

University of Dundee

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Technologies in Practice

Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Technique

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Technologies in Practice

Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Technique

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Doctor of Philosophy

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I declare that I, Eoin Carney, am the author of this thesis, and that, unless otherwise stated, I have consulted all cited references. I declare that I have completed all the work of which this thesis is a record, and that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

Eoin Carney. Date: 25/5/18

ABSTRACT

The problem that this thesis seeks to address is the hermeneutic tension between practical reason and technology. According to hermeneutics, the types of knowledge associated with practical understanding incorporate questions of the self and lived experience. In contrast, the types of knowledge and capability associated with modern technology are independent of questions of self-understanding. Technical approaches to practical dilemmas produce generalizable, detachable solutions, thereby disavowing the central role of hermeneutic appropriation in the process of understanding meaning. If a technology works in the same way across different contexts and applications, the notion of an interpreting, appropriating self seems superfluous to the question of technology.

However, following an analysis of Paul Ricoeur's distinctive understandings of hermeneutic distanciation, appropriation, and technique, I argue that technologies can become objects of hermeneutic engagement once we recognize their variable and uncertain nature at the practical level. Using Ricoeur's conception of the productive circle between distanciation and belonging, the alienating distances associated with technologies can be re-read as moments of distanciation, i.e., as reflective outcomes of practical engagements that, in turn, project new possibilities for action and understanding.

This means that our practical self-understanding is as bound to techniques and technologies as it is to more conventional hermeneutic objects like a text, narrative or artwork. For Ricoeur, hermeneutic techniques are meaningful because they reveal possibilities for action that would otherwise remain concealed. Likewise, subjects engaging with technologies develop unanticipated applications and functions at the practical level through appropriating technologies in novel, creative ways. In this way, practical self-understanding and technologies depend on one another for development. This mutual, interpretive interaction reveals a hermeneutic circle between the practical self and the technical devices and artefacts that mediate self-understanding at a distance.

INTRODUCTION

At first look, the work of Paul Ricoeur has nothing new to say about technology. When Ricoeur does refer to modern technology, he tends to simply repeat the criticisms of technological rationality put forward by thinkers such as Heidegger, Habermas, and Marcuse. By situating many aspects of his work within the tradition of modern hermeneutics, Ricoeur was destined to repeat these views of technology since hermeneutics, as I read it, gains much of its critical power through its opposition to modern technology. I suggest that, against the perceived *impracticality* of technology, hermeneutic philosophies call on the renewal of *practical* forms of reason. Whereas technology, according to these thinkers, is often defined by its univocity and utility, practical reason works through the assumption that the practical world is variable and uncertain. To paraphrase Habermas, technologies are seen as representing a decontextualizing, reductive mode of reason that “colonizes the lifeworld”,¹ while hermeneutic modes of reasoning treat the lifeworld as a dialogical, *living* environment, in which meanings are disclosed contextually by vulnerable, capable selves.

However, more recent approaches to the philosophy of technology have turned their focus to aspects of technology which seem to be denied by the hermeneutic critique, i.e., their *practical*, socially-embedded, variable features. Through postphenomenological approaches, for example, technologies are seen as being *multistable*, and reflective of questions of embodiment.² Areas of Actor-Network Theory treat technology through performative, interpretive concepts.³ Beyond the philosophy of technology, the field of STS focuses on empirical analyses of technologies in relation to society. All these approaches suggest that technologies, rather than exhibiting an over-arching essence or logic, are pluralistic and

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol 1*, trans. Tomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol 2*, trans. Tomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

² Verbeek on Ihde’s concept of ‘multistability’: “The insight that technologies cannot be separated from their use contexts implies that they have no “essence”; they are what they are only in their use. A technology can receive an identity only within a concrete context of use, and this identity is determined not only by the technology in question but also by the way in which it becomes interpreted”, Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 117.

³ Don Ihde identifies 1979 as a “watershed year” for this ‘turn’ in thinking in English-language philosophy of technology, due to the simultaneous publication of two books - his own *Technics and Praxis: A Philosophy of Technology*, and the book *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar. See. Don Ihde, “Preface: Positioning Postphenomenology”, in Robert Rosenberg and Peter-Paul Verbeek eds., *Postphenomenological Investigations: Essays on Human-Technology Relations* (Lexington Books, 2015), vii-xvi.

integrated within a social, historical horizon of meaning. Far from being a demonic ‘other’, technologies are seen as being as ‘readable’, or as open to interpretation, as texts and discourses.

Ricoeur’s work, I argue, has much to contribute to both a critical and appropriative account of technology. Indeed, since for Ricoeur critical distance and practical appropriation are related moments of understanding, Ricoeur’s work offers a way perceiving the dialectical unity of both perspectives. Although Ricoeur does not thematically discuss modern technology, he does discuss the role that *technique* plays in relation to understanding (in his work on Freudian technique). I suggest that Ricoeur’s understanding of *technique*, as a mode of distancing related to practical questions of meaning and understanding, holds the key for developing a Ricoeurian approach to contemporary technology. Ricoeur’s understanding of technique that I shall outline emphasizes the interrelationship of the two key concepts: *distanciation* and *appropriation*.

Against Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricoeur aims to rehabilitate the notion of distancing by arguing that an alienated, distanced perspective is potentially a point of *reflection*. Although, in the hermeneutic sense, to participate in, or *belong* to, a tradition, conversation, event, etc., is to be open to *understanding* it, Ricoeur suggests that to distance oneself from a direct experience is also a productive way of bringing oneself closer to it, since the perspective of distancing is a way of disclosing new possibilities for action and understanding. Distancing has both a *reflective* and *projective* character. The text, as the paradigm of distancing, translates immediate, living understandings implicit in discourses into a relatively fixed, systematic mode of representation. However, Ricoeur stresses the *dynamic* nature of this distancing - texts are always open to *interpretation* and *appropriation*. The hermeneutic circle between belonging and distancing means that practical experience is *mediated* by the text. Furthermore, due to the *difference* between distancing and belonging, the mediation process is a difficult one. The difficulty renders understanding a perpetual task or effort. Ricoeur often highlights the generative nature of this circular relation.

Appropriation, in Ricoeur’s sense, is an indeterminate but productive task. It is related to practical understanding because it *tests* practical understanding. When encountering a text, a reader must account for not only the way the text speaks to them or reflects their practical concerns, but also the way that the text, in its integrity and distance, differs from them and challenges their concerns. Appropriation, understood in this sense, involves an *enlargement of*

the self; a reader expands their horizon of understanding by exposing it to the projected world of the text. Distanciation is also a condition for understanding (along with belonging) because a “naïve” understanding, for Ricoeur, is a deficient one, prone to the illusions of the ego. Through testing these illusions against the distanced world of the text, the reader is open to the transformative potential of the text. However, any ‘new’ understanding itself must be understood as subject to further testing, at the practical level, or in relation to new moments of distanciation, and so the whole process is relativized. In short, the process of *learning*, of understanding *better*, involves alienation and transformation, provoked through the dialectic of distance and belonging.

The question that I will pursue over the course of this thesis is whether this dialectic of distance and belonging can be applied to our understandings of contemporary technological phenomena. The hermeneutic critique or suspicion of technology allows for the highlighting of the difference between practice and its corresponding forms of reason and understanding, and the technologies that mediate and affect these understandings. However, whereas hermeneutic approaches tend to emphasize the *negative* effects of this difference, I aim to argue that this difference can be conceived along the lines of a productive distanciation. That is, technologies are related to practical understandings through their distance from them. The positive side of the negativity of technological distanciation lies in its ability, like the text, to create new possibilities for action.

Just as the text is the “destination” of discourse,⁴ technological designs and solutions are a possible destination of practical wisdom. Whereas discourses and practical wisdom are situated, concrete, living phenomena, their insights demand to be realized, transmitted, and communicated in a structural form. However, just as the act of translating or inscribing discourse in a textual form is a process of differentiation and distanciation that opens new questions and problems (through the configurational, *projective* character of the text), technological devices and solutions themselves have their own projective character and demand re-appropriation. In this way there is a hermeneutic circle between practices and techniques. Techniques are the outcome of practical engagements and questions but they also, in turn, raise further questions and challenge practical understanding. This thesis, firstly, examines features of Ricoeur’s work that are relevant to elaborating this circle between

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text,” in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 142.

practices and techniques, and then explores approaches to contemporary technological phenomena from other thinkers whom I argue help articulate the hermeneutic tension between practice and technology.

Technologies and practical self-understanding

Ricoeur's concept of appropriation borrows from Gadamer's understanding of *application*. For Gadamer, application is a necessary feature of hermeneutic understanding, and is distinguished from a cruder sense of application that is at work in the concept of "method". Whereas a method treats application as a separate moment – a method is developed according to rational principles or observations and then later applied in different contexts – hermeneutic application asserts the coinciding of truth and application. In ancient Greek philosophy, the exemplary case of the hermeneutic sense of application was found in Aristotle's account of *phronēsis*. *Phronēsis*, or practical wisdom, involves a mediation between general or formal rules and singular cases. A practical judgement involves grasping the *significance* of a rule in relation to a concrete situation, just as hermeneutic application involves mediating the distance between a text and the concrete situation of the interpretation. Rules, principles, texts, and so on, can only appear significant in light of living, singular practical concerns. Therefore, application is a hermeneutic *condition* for understanding – it is only against the background of present pre-understandings, concrete concerns and norms that a distance is capable of being bridged.

The intellectual virtue of *techne* is seen by Gadamer as similar to practical wisdom in that it deals with variable subject matter. However, it differs when it comes to the question of application. Since application involves the mediation of *self*-knowledge by distance (the other, the text, history), *techne*, an impersonal form of knowledge, is given less hermeneutic weight. In this sense, it is closer to the modern sense of "method" that Gadamer associates with the sciences. Practical wisdom arises from the living *experience* of the practicing self. Its knowledge cannot be 'detached' from the context of this experience and be transmitted or communicated to others in the same way that knowledge of how to make or produce can. Gadamer's relating of the question of contemporary *practical wisdom* to classical questions of *techne* and *phronēsis*, helps to highlight the continuity and depth of a tension that continues to influence the relation between technologies and our human, practical understandings of the world.

In the context of a technological age, the hermeneutic tension between *techne* and *phronēsis* takes on a renewed significance. At a time when the types of knowledge associated with *techne*

seem to be more pervasive and ubiquitous in post-industrial societies, the hermeneutic emphasis on *phronēsis* and *application* possesses a critical tone. To highlight this critique, I explore the perspectives of Albert Borgmann, Lorenzo C. Simpson, and others. According to these approaches, technologies not only oppose the types of understanding associated with practical wisdom, but threaten to conceal the human *capacity* for practical wisdom. As devices and systems grow more sophisticated and *effective*, we become ‘disburdened’ from the daily practical tasks that had constituted much of human experience. For hermeneutics, *practices* involve difficult, arduous, “non-identical repetitions”, and it is this “working-through” character of practical engagement that is eclipsed by the modern technological devices that render many of these tasks and relations obsolete. Our daily, habitual modes of engagement have been transformed by technologies into modes of engagement that foreground functionality and utility.

On the other hand, a line of thought pursued by Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault, Bernard Stiegler, Peter-Paul Verbeek, and others, suggests returning to the ancient concept of *techne* in order to stress the interrelationship between *techne* and the *self*, the relationship that Gadamer denies. From this perspective, all human customs, practices, social actions, and so on, are mediated by the techniques that condition and enable the transmission of these practices. Self-formation and learning always involves apprenticeship and training in particular techniques, training which then affects our possibilities for action by shaping our *habitus*.⁵ Self-reflection plays a crucial role in this approach, since it is through reflection or distancing that features of practice and the self that require development or transformation are identified. Techniques of the self are methods of training which aim to operate on these aspects of the individual in order to transform the self and render it more capable or moral.

Both approaches to *techne* seem to emphasize different features of the self, features that are related to one another in Ricoeur’s work. Gadamer’s account of *phronēsis*, and its opposition to *techne*, suggests a *vulnerable* or fragile self – it is through the concrete experience of

⁵ “It could be said, then, from Aristotle’s work, that different types of practice involve different forms of knowledge with varied aims and objects, which also involve differential ways of distributing human energies and reflecting on conduct. These can be regarded as technologies in the very general sense because moral training has an end product, even if moral action in itself does not: the end product of moral training is a human being with the habitual dispositions and capacities to act morally. *Technology, then, could be said to be the practical rationality that accompanies and guides productive activities, and, thus, is enmeshed in those social relations in which people are educated and trained...* *Habitus*, then, denotes an acquired ability or faculty rather than an acquired habit to act in a routine way. The term ability suggests the possibility of doing something, of acting in ways that are creative and not wholly predetermined.” Ian Burkitt, “Technologies of the Self: Habitus and Capacities,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 32:2 (2002), 223-225.

uncertainty that practical wisdom is achieved. “Truth”, in this sense, is not something that can be produced or aimed toward, it appears at the ‘limits’ of a method or principles, in the singularity of the unanticipated case. A *technologies of the self* approach suggests that *techne* complements and cultivates the *capacities* of the self. The self is not something ‘given’, it is something that has to be created and formed through training and with the aid of techniques. For Ricoeur, the self is constituted both through its belonging to a tradition or world, and through its capacity to produce reflective variations on this tradition, i.e., by its vulnerability and capability. He accepts that our understanding of the world is *mediated* by the institutions, works, and productions that guide our actions and shape meaningful relations in the lifeworld, and yet aims to stress the difficult nature of this mediation process. The self is also something that surpasses these mediations, it is always also ‘other’ than the customs that shape it. This approach allows us to develop a *dialectical* account of technique and practical understanding, where practical understanding highlights the vulnerable, fragile aspects of the self, and technique its reflective capacities.

Combining a hermeneutic critique of technology with an appropriative account of technology means that in practical appropriation a difference is retained, between the human and the machine. Technologies, as seen through the hermeneutic critique, cannot be reduced to “technologies of the self”, i.e., systems or techniques that form and shape the *habitus* of the self, since there is always something in practical understanding that *exceeds* the technological enframing. Modern technological phenomena, such as the device and the interface, help highlight this feature since, while related to practical understanding, they also remain at a distance, they possess a ‘life’ or world of their own. A technology of the self will never completely transform the individual because the application always remains incomplete. The transformative possibilities of technologies or techniques must be *appropriated*, a process which, in Ricoeur’s account, retains the *distance* between the thing being appropriated and the self. The model for technological engagement, then, is not the transformation of the human *habitus* through technologies of the self, but the playful, hermeneutic appropriation of *significant* features of the world of technics.

Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology

Ricoeur’s concepts of *distanciation* and *appropriation*, when extended to modern technologies, allow for a middle position between two, polarized approaches to technology. These

approaches are labelled by Borgmann as “substantivism” and “instrumentalism”.⁶ Many features of a hermeneutic critique of technology, including Ricoeur’s own remarks on technology, can be seen as expressing a *substantivist* account of technology; individual technologies are determined or shaped by a common essence. Technological devices and processes are simply the concrete manifestations of an ontotheological mode of viewing the world and therefore can be reduced to this perspective. This essence, furthermore, extends to the world of human affairs and conditions how we are in the world. On the other hand, an *instrumentalist* approach asserts that there is no inherent meaning in different technologies, and certainly not a shared one. Instead, the meaning of a technology is exclusively related to its utility, i.e., technologies are mere *means* for achieving an end. Technology is seen as being neutral.

The concept of *distanciation* is intended to respond to the *suspicion* of technology that arises due to a substantivist account of technology. Distanciation, when applied to technique and technologies implies two things. Firstly, the ‘distance’ or difference of technology is a *relative* or *reflective* distance and, secondly, it is potentially a productive distance, enabling new understandings to emerge. Technologies can indeed be seen to be ‘autonomous’, but in a sense that is similar to the world of the text. Accepting the distanciating effect of technologies also means that engagements with technologies need to go beyond a ‘literal’ or ‘everyday’ interaction, they demand a degree of decoding and interpretation.

The concept of *appropriation* responds to the instrumentalist claim that technologies are neutral. If application were conceived of as a separate moment, distinct from technological design, then technologies indeed would be neutral tools within the lifeworld. What they embody would be the ‘objective’ forms of knowledge that Gadamer associates with *method*, i.e., knowledge that is not value-laden, is purely rational, and so on. However, viewing technologies as things that are *appropriated* in the hermeneutic sense means accepting that they possess inherent horizons of possible meanings and uses. Furthermore, technologies themselves have an appropriating relation to practice; they are reflective of questions and concerns that initially arise within the lifeworld. Technologies, in this sense, are historical, meaningful, things.

⁶ Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7-12.

The philosophy of technology and Ricoeur

In analysing Ricoeur's work alongside questions of technique and technology, I hope to demonstrate Ricoeur's distinctive approach to praxis and practical understanding. Ricoeur's attempts to highlight the productive value of both a participatory account of belonging to practices, traditions, and cultures, on the one hand, and critical reflections on these practices, on the other, leads to a robust, adaptive understanding of practice that is capable of incorporating multiple forms of knowledge. Technological and scientific innovations can be evaluated both in-themselves and in relation to how they can be appropriated by actual, living subjects. Although Ricoeur himself stresses the negative impacts of modern technology, as post-industrial societies become more dependent on technologies, questions of its transformative effects on human cultures and practical understandings become more complicated and arguably cannot be reduced to their harmful or destructive tendencies. In light of these historical developments, Ricoeur's work offers a way of negotiating technology that keeps in view both immediate, practical questions of human understanding in the face of devices, interfaces, systems, etc., and more general questions of the meaning of technology as a whole.

In the wake of the deaths of both Ricoeur and Gadamer, it is important to map new paths for hermeneutic philosophy. The future of hermeneutics, following both thinkers' productive criticisms of Romanticism and the hermeneutic tradition as a whole, is in question again. This thesis asks whether, following the paths opened up by Ricoeur, the future of hermeneutics lies in its understanding of praxis as reflective belonging. Technology, in its threatening but intimate relation to human practice, acts as a point of confrontation and re-invigoration for this tradition.

Overview of Sections

The first three sections of the thesis present readings of Ricoeur's work, while the fourth section aims to situate Ricoeur's work within more recent discussions of technology.

The first section is an introductory section that examines the hermeneutic question of application and the potential this question has for investigating technology. Although a hermeneutic critique of technology operates on many levels, I focus on the tension that emerges through the different senses of application found in hermeneutic approaches to language and a scientific understanding of method. Whereas methods and techniques seek to establish objective forms of knowledge, i.e., knowledge that remains constant regardless of contextual

variables, a hermeneutic account of application emphasizes the guiding role of the concrete *question* in the production of knowledge and understanding. What is significant is not the constant themes or ideas of a tradition or text, for example, but the way in which these themes are reflected in the current concerns of the reader. This means that application involves *practical reason*, a mode of engagement that is capable of productively bridging the distance between a text, theory, principle, law, etc., and the variable demands found in the lifeworld. However, whereas certain approaches to hermeneutic application emphasize the way that *technological rationality* is opposed to practical modes of reason, I suggest that reading technologies in terms of their practical effects helps to bring them into dialogue with hermeneutics. The modern hermeneutic tradition, which emphasizes the difference between explanation and understanding, objective knowledge and practical knowledge, is taken up by Ricoeur in order to highlight the dialectical unity of these two forms. This provides an opening for considering the ways that technologies, even in their objectifying character, can be related to the task of practical understanding. A hermeneutic approach to technological application should challenge both the assumption that technologies remain wholly foreign to practical experience, as well as the assumption that a radical difference exists between the modes of application associated with ‘objectifying’ approaches (technologies, explanations, methods) and those associated with more ‘established’ hermeneutic subject matters (artworks, narratives, texts). The unifying theme across both the sciences and the arts is the phenomena of reflective distanciation.

The second section explores Ricoeur’s own understanding of application as *appropriation* that aims to account for the dual nature of practice as distanciation and belonging. For Ricoeur, hermeneutic belonging, a key feature of application, is mixed. It is always mediated by linguistic structures and therefore always involves a displacement or distance. This means that we are also capable of *explaining* our practice, or of translating practical experience into structural, communicative modes of expression. However, Ricoeur also stresses that if the *question* of belonging is lost sight of, for example in Husserl’s idealism or the abstracting tendencies of a structuralist science, then explanations run the risk of becoming *insignificant*. Therefore, although the experience of belonging in an unmediated way is potentially unreachable, it becomes a guiding question for all modes of hermeneutic understanding. Explanations have to be understood as reflective of these questions.

Section 3 examines, what I am calling, Ricoeur’s account of *technique*. This section acts as a bridge between the first part of the thesis, an exegetical account of aspects of Ricoeur’s theory,

and the second, an examination of the practical features of contemporary technologies. It remains within the bounds of Ricoeur's thought, but it seeks to extract a hermeneutical account of *technique* from Ricoeur's readings of psychoanalysis and his understanding of narrative distanciation. Although overtly critical of modern technology, Ricoeur nevertheless develops an alternative understanding of *technique* that escapes the hermeneutic suspicion of technology. He does so by dialectically relating technique to practical understanding. In his discussion of Freud's psychoanalytic writings on technique, Ricoeur's own bias towards techniques and technologies is revealed when he develops a positive account of technique but calls it a *nontechnique*. That is, psychoanalytic techniques are not hermeneutic, in the sense of being directly related to questions of meaning and interpretation, but neither are they 'technological', in the sense of being representative of a dominating attitude towards nature. Instead, they are *indirectly* related to questions of meaning and practice. They have a positive relation to practical understanding because they unmask or reveal already-present practical understandings that are hidden or buried. These implicit understandings, or 'repetitions' in Freud's terms, can only be disclosed or 'remembered' with the aid of techniques. Yet, techniques alone are not sufficient. It is only through the dialectical relation between techniques and practical understandings, a relation that is a struggle or *working-through*, that techniques are seen as productive.

As with psychoanalytic techniques that deal with the quasi-object of the human unconscious, Ricoeur's account of narrative highlights that way that the function of the plot is to configure the quasi-object of the narrative world. Narratives are distanced from the living world of action through these configurational or artificial features. Their temporality more closely resembles a *time of works*, as opposed to a living, historically-effected *time of action*. Ricoeur draws on the work-like, distanciated character of narrative and highlights the ways that narrative mediation is *active*. It is open to application (*mimesis*₃), a process that translates the world of narrative into concrete initiatives for action and understanding. As with psychoanalytic techniques, questions concerning the configuration or organisation of narrative structures are inseparable from the practical questions of meaning and intelligibility. This understanding of a productive tension between a configured, autonomous work, and the modes of action it engenders in living subjects, is mirrored in accounts of technologies explored in Section 4.

Section Four directly considers questions of modern technological phenomena. Since Ricoeur did not engage with technology in terms of its practical manifestations, I turn instead to the works of recent philosophers. Albert Borgmann and David Lewin provide examples of the

hermeneutic critique of modern technologies in their analyses of the device and the interface. A contrast to these approaches is provided by Peter-Paul Verbeek, Alexander Galloway, and Brenda Laurel, who all emphasise the practical, variable nature of technological mediation. This second set of thinkers provide a better account of the role technologies play in practice, which can be understood along the lines of Ricoeur's understanding of *technique*, i.e., just as structures, psychoanalytic techniques, and narratives both enable and challenge human understanding by mediating at a distance, technological devices and interfaces can be seen to have a challenging and transformative effect on our *practical* understandings of the world. In Ricoeur's account of technique, *appropriation* is also required in the task of understanding (otherwise techniques risk becoming methods of adaptation and domination). Similarly, accounts of technologies in practice emphasise the way that our appropriations of technologies are crucial for understanding their meaning. The meaning of technology is not located in a transcendental essence, but in the concrete interactions between technological designs and artefacts, and the subjects who engage with them. In the final chapter of this section I also examine the work of Gilbert Simondon, whose account of the autonomy of the technical object resembles Ricoeur's account of the autonomy of the text. Just as a *playful appropriation* is required in traversing the distance between the world of the text and the world of the reader, a similar approach to technologies should be adopted following Simondon's analysis. The hermeneutic attitude that we began with, the critical suspicion of modern technology, is capable of being transformed through practical engagements with technologies, engagements that accept both the distanciated and practical features of technical becoming.

SECTION 1: RICOEUR AND TECHNOLOGY

The following section examines some of the questions and challenges that arise when hermeneutic theory is placed alongside a consideration of technology. Key aspects of the hermeneutic projects of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, especially when articulating the *value* of hermeneutics with regard to ethics and practices, operate through a *critical opposition* to ‘modern technology’. It is within the context of an age dominated by technologies and technocratic forms of reasoning that the hermeneutic call to an embodied, contextual form of *practical reason* gains significance. For Ricoeur, the technological age coincides with the age of demythologization and the “desert of criticism”¹, and threatens to eclipse or conceal the sacred dimension of being-in-the-world. For Gadamer, technological and scientific understandings of application obscure the hermeneutic idea application always involves selection and interpretation. Technology works by eradicating the need for deliberating, participating subjects when being applied. A technological ‘application’ will perform in the same way no matter how often it is repeated or in which context it operates. Practical wisdom, on the other hand, can be seen as the paradigm of what Catherine Pickstock calls “non-identical repetition”; applied iterations of a tradition work to deepen and unfold it, often in unexpected or novel ways.² Ricoeur also embraces this understanding of hermeneutic application in concepts such as appropriation and *mimesis*.³ On the other hand, within the history of modern hermeneutics there have also been some attempts to consider the role of *technique* in the process of practical application. This alternative understanding of technique allows for a hermeneutic reconsideration of modern technologies through shifting focus from their transcendental essence, towards the ways that they depend on practical application in their functioning. Grasping the significance of technological application is achieved against the background of an understanding of technologies as pluralistic, unfinished outcomes of practical engagements with the world.

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 349.

² Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity: The Literary Agenda* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

1. HERMENEUTICS AND THE QUESTION OF TECHNIQUE

I don't want to imply that practicality is another word for comfort. I rather mean that it brings us closer to the work, establishing a rapport with it, rather than encouraging a network of ideas that keeps us outside it.

This is where the practical differs from the technical. The technical, no matter how foolproof, is always in the realm of the speculative - a notion about perfection - the system. But what happens when these gods fail us?³

The first part of this chapter will explore some of the hermeneutic criticisms of technology. I intend to retain an important feature of these criticisms, namely, the hermeneutic emphasis on practical understanding that acts as a valuable corrective to technologies. However, I aim to read practical reason not as an alternative to technology, but as an integral part of technology (and *vice versa*). This perspective can be achieved, I argue, by taking into account more recent approaches to technology which emphasize the *uncertain*, interpretation-dependant nature of technological design and application. These approaches will be explored in more detail in section four of the thesis (Technological Application). In part two of this chapter I examine the ways that hermeneutic approaches (Ricoeur, Schleiermacher, Foucault), already contain the resources for thinking about the dialectical relation between technologies and practical application.

1.1 A HERMENEUTIC CRITIQUE OF TECHNOLOGY

An aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics that has been the subject of criticism and close examination is his rehabilitation of the concept of application (*Anwendung*), an approach shared and extended by Ricoeur in his use of the term appropriation (*Aneignung*) and in related concepts such as *mimesis*³. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer identifies application as the "central problem" of hermeneutics, which is "to be found in all understanding".⁴ It is an idea that, for a time, was 'forgotten' due to the "aesthetic-historical positivism" branch of the hermeneutic tradition that drew an equivalence between *understanding* and *interpretation (explication)*.

³ Morton Feldman, "Some Elementary Questions", in *Give My Regards to Eight Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B.H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 63.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 1975), 307.

What Gadamer calls *aesthetic differentiation*, allows for a bracketing of the question of application. For example, when I consider an artwork from a historicist or aesthetic perspective I interpret it according to the theories and knowledge I have of art history and aesthetics. The ‘truth’ of the work follows the *logic of correspondences*, certain features of the work match with other works of that period or with expected explorations of thematic forms, and so on. The goal of hermeneutic methods, understood in this way, was to overcome historical distance and understand the author better than they understood themselves. In Ricoeur’s terms, questions of the work itself were bypassed in favour of the “Romantic pretension of recovering, by congenial coincidence, the genius of the author: from genius to genius!”⁵

However, against this approach to understanding, which ends at the level of explication, Gadamer emphasizes that the more fundamental *truth* of the work is found in its *contemporaneity*. The work is not only a set of relations that correspond to a certain period or genre, it is also something which *addresses* the spectator, i.e., the aesthetic experience is also an *event* that incorporates both the work and the spectator. Hermeneutic application is still a response to the problem of historical or cultural *distance*, yet, in place of the idea of overcoming distance, distance is seen as a conditional, mediating factor for understanding. The figure of the author is no longer that of another ‘mind’ to be understood, but that of an *other* who addresses me at a distance. Application or appropriation, in this sense, “takes the place of the answer in the dialogical situation, in the same way that ‘revelation’ or ‘disclosure’ takes the place of ostensive reference in the dialogical situation.”⁶

Traditional hermeneutic theories distinguished three elements of interpretation; *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding), *subtilitas explicanda* (interpretation), and *subtilitas applicandi* (application). Gadamer argues that these three moments are related and inseparable – to understand is to already have explicated, and to explicate involves questions of application (whether consciously acknowledged or not). For Gadamer, “we consider application to be just as integral a part of the hermeneutic process as are understanding and interpretation.”⁷ What this revision is explicitly aimed at correcting is a view that sees an interpretation as something that is first arrived at, and then later applied in various contexts. This view is represented most

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, “Appropriation”, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. & trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 190.

⁶ Ricoeur, “Appropriation,” 185.

⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 308.

strongly by *techne* and scientific forms of reasoning, where application appears as a separate moment, distinct from a theory, skill-set, technological design, and so on.

The reason why this aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics has been debated and challenged (for example by Habermas, Emilio Betti and Hirsch) is because linking application to interpretation and understanding implies that all interpretation is related to the context of the interpreter, i.e., it becomes very difficult to externally *validate* the claims of an interpretation or appropriation since they are *bound* to the experience of the event/engagement itself. Habermas, for example, challenged this view on the grounds that it does not take into account power-dynamics in social settings, which are alien and violent in relation to particular interpreting subjects, and which require a distanced, rigorous critique (explication). If all interpretation involves appropriation, how is it possible to develop an emancipatory critique? Habermas, instead, developed a "depth hermeneutics" which combined hermeneutic interpretation with a critique of the underlying deep structures of the text (for example, the ideological functions).⁸

The two approaches, critique and application, are not entirely incompatible, a fact that is attested to by Ricoeur's attempt to incorporate both. What Gadamer's concept of application succeeds in articulating is the productive (and arguably critical) role of *phronēsis* in the task of understanding. The concept of *phronēsis* includes within it the difficult but crucial feature of human *solidarity*. For example, in a letter to Richard J. Bernstein, Gadamer writes,

I am concerned with the fact that the displacement of human reality never goes so far that no forms of solidarity exist any longer. Plato saw this very well: there is no city so corrupted that it does not realize something of the true city; that is what, in my opinion, is the basis for the possibility of practical philosophy.⁹

In place of the figure of the 'ideal' city, Gadamer suggests that *concrete* reality of the corrupted city is the locus of true understanding. Viewed from the perspective of critical theory, hermeneutic application is read as a submission to the status-quo, which leaves the vulnerable, interpreting subject in a position of dependence. Yet, as Gadamer highlights, this emphasis on the centrality of practical application in understanding is also necessary to affirm the solidarity that is crucial in any work of understanding. Furthermore, in the context of an age dominated

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 214-245.

⁹ Richard J Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 264.

by technological forms of rationality, the emphasis on *phronēsis* serves as a critical corrective to an attitude that is forgetful of the power of application in the determination of meaning.

Solidarity with a work or with others is something that can only be cultivated through a practical engagement with the world, since through the repetitions of practice relations of concern and belonging are established. These features of practice and hermeneutic application are threatened by what Habermas and Gadamer discuss as the dominance of a scientific attitude to understanding, an attitude which is linked to the rise of modern technology. Modern technology is seen as an expression of the interests of scientific method, which centre on the desire to evaluate and control a set of practical relations by reducing them to a theoretical perspective. Whereas practice, in the hermeneutic sense, is aimed towards developing a *mastery* of a situation, through subjecting oneself to a set of conditions or constraints, technology aims towards *control*. For example, mastering the skill of surfing does not imply control of the sea.

A practical application is seen by hermeneutics as a way of unfolding or deepening an already-present historical thread through the act of repeating something in a new way, for example, the way a law appears in light of an unanticipated case or the way a biblical verse can gain new significance and power in light of contemporary political situation. In contrast, technology works by presenting history as controllable and even as something we can overcome. Since both technologies and practical reason operate at the *practical* level, albeit guided by different concerns, discerning the difference and appropriateness of either perspective becomes tricky in cases where technology takes over from practical reason. Habermas summarises this perspective as follows:

The real difficulty in the relation of theory and practice does not arise from this new function of science as a technological force, but rather from the fact that we are no longer able to distinguish between practical and technical power. Yet even a civilization that has been rendered scientific is not granted dispensation from practical questions. Therefore a peculiar danger arises when the process of scientification transgresses the limit of technical questions, without, however, departing from the level of rationality confined to the technological horizon. For then no attempt is made to attain a rational consensus on the part of citizens concerning the practical control of their destiny. Its place is taken by the attempt to attain technical control over history by perfecting the administration of society, an attempt that is as impractical as it is unhistorical.¹⁰

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 255.

For both Habermas and Gadamer, technology, whilst being related to the practical field, is entirely *impractical* and *unhistorical* in its execution. Gadamer presents the same contrast through the different senses of ‘application’ found in the arts and the sciences,

The problem of the application of science already presupposes that science as such possesses its self-certain and autonomous existence prior to all application and free from all reference to possible application; but thanks to just this freedom from purpose, its knowledge is available for any application whatsoever, precisely because science has no competence to preside over its application.¹¹

For Habermas, the execution of a technological project of controlling society fails due to its impracticality, and for Gadamer, the forms of knowledge associated with scientific theory fail according to hermeneutic standards due to the lack of “competence” required in determining the practical application of theoretical models. The result is that knowledge gained through theoretical projects and applied through technological means of control either fails completely at the practical level, or else works *too* well, in that its functionality conceals the fragile practical relations at work in the application. So, technology is both *impractical* in that it is prone to failure, and *anti-practical* in that the functionality it offers draws subjects away from a deliberative, living relation with their environment.

A simple example of the skewed relation between technological rationality and practical application is found in a recent product by the company Juicero. The product was a juice machine that cost \$400. You inserted pouches of juiced vegetables into the machine that would then squeeze them for you. The product failed, and the company went out of business, when people quickly realised that simply squeezing the pouches by hand proved far more effective than using the machine. Even the wifi-connectivity of the machine, which allowed the machine to notify you when the pouch is out of date, was rendered pointless by the expiration date printed on the pouches themselves. As with the classic myth/joke about the Americans spending one million dollars to develop a space-pen while the Russian used a pencil, the Juicero juicer failed because it strayed too far from the instruction of practical wisdom and common sense, “Juicero has since become something of a symbol of the absurd Silicon Valley start-up industry that raises huge sums of money for solutions to non-problems.”¹² Application, in the

¹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Welt Ohne Geschichte”, in *Truth and Historicity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 8. Translation of this quote appears in Joel Weisenheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: a reading of truth and method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 188-189, fn. 52.

¹² Sam Levin, “Squeezed out: widely mocked startup Juicero is shutting down,” *The Guardian*, September 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/sep/01/juicero-silicon-valley-shutting-down>.

hermeneutic sense, refers to the primacy of the concrete *question* or problem that guides the work of interpretation. Technological “solutions to non-problems” are symptomatic of the forgetfulness of this point in modern forms of reasoning. For Gadamer, “understanding...involves something like applying a meaning to our situation, to the questions we want answered...*Motivated by the particular questions of the moment*, understanding is not just reproductive but, because it involves application, always also a productive activity.”¹³

However, technological forms of rationality are especially problematic not because they are vulnerable to failure, but because they cause us to become forgetful of the practical questions and problems that guide interpretation. As the quote at the beginning of the chapter by Morton Feldman suggests, a “network” of ideas and technologies, or, as Borgmann writes, “the tightly-patterned character”¹⁴ of modern technology, can end up serving as a *distraction* - a set of meaningless processes that nevertheless work. As Todd Mei has pointed out, the *work* done by the machine or device comes at the *cost* of becoming forgetful of our dependency on being.¹⁵ For example, although the presence of satellite-navigation systems in our cars save us from the work and hassle of consulting maps or locals, our prior awareness of a dependency on environmental ‘symbols’ and cues, such as landmarks, terrains, local knowledge, and so on, is lost. A hard-won practical skill – the ability to read and decipher maps – is traded for the relative ease and comfort of the GPS device, which requires relatively little skill to operate. The ontological cost is in terms of our living relation to our environment, which can only be disclosed by *working* through it, by being personally invested in it. When we allow a device, for example a microwave, to do the work on our behalf, our own relation to the world is destabilized (we no longer need to engage in the difficult and transformative practice of learning to cook, for example). In Morton Feldman’s case, he is asking whether musical ‘ideas’ or systems (he is writing in the shadow of Schoenberg, Boulez, Stockhausen, etc., as well as the ‘historicist’ account of musical development in general), which promise perfection and intellectual mastery, actually end up keeping the composer outside the work they are aiming to produce. His alternative, which is similar to Gadamer’s, is to instead return to an engagement with the *practical* dimension of composition, in order to build a *rapport* with the work. He

¹³ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994), 115-116. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Albert Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, in Robert C. Scharff and Val Duesk (eds.) *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition: An Anthology* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 331.

¹⁵ Todd Mei, “Heidegger in the Machine: The Difference between *Techne* and *Mechane*,” *Continental Philosophy Review* (2015) 267-292.

considers the type of chair he sits in to write, the type of pen he uses and so on, features which from a purely ‘musical’, theoretical perspective seem irrelevant, but from the perspective of the actual, living composer are essential.¹⁶

Although both Habermas and Gadamer have similar criticisms of the cultural dominance of a scientific/rationalistic view of the human world, their responses to the issue, as we have seen, differ. This is especially true with regard to the question of hermeneutic application. Habermas’ “depth hermeneutics”¹⁷ or critical hermeneutics is, as Ricoeur argues, guided by the attitude of *suspicion*. It entails a direct confrontation with the structures and traditions that mediate and distort our understanding of ourselves. Therefore, it embraces the alienating function of critique; we must distance ourselves from the practices and traditions we perpetuate unknowingly, in order to perceive them with a more critical eye. A hermeneutic approach, on the other hand, advocates a positive recovery of already-present resources in the lifeworld, and especially those found within tradition. The two approaches first appear as “alternatives”, one negative and the other positive, “In contrast to the positive assessment by hermeneutics, the theory of ideology adopts a suspicious approach, seeing tradition as merely the systematically distorted expression of communication under unacknowledged conditions of violence.”¹⁸

Ricoeur’s own approach wishes to retain both modes of interpretation. Gadamer’s concept of application outlines a hermeneutic project for the productive *recovery* of meaning. However, for Ricoeur, a project of recovery must also be the act of a capable agent, that is, an agent who is able to evaluate, reflect and discern *appropriate* meanings. Every act of hermeneutic recovery, in this sense, includes the moment of reflective distancing. According to Ricoeur, Gadamer presents a false alternative, either a fully committed participation in the event or occasion of truth, or the isolation and alienation of method, an antinomy that,

seems to me to be the mainspring of Gadamer's work, namely, the opposition between alienating distancing and belonging. This opposition is an antinomy because it establishes an untenable alternative: on the one hand, alienating distancing is the attitude that renders possible the objectification that reigns in the human sciences; but on the other hand, this distancing, which is the condition of the scientific status of the sciences, is at the same time the fall that destroys the fundamental and primordial relation whereby we belong to and participate in the historical reality that we claim to construct as an object. Whence the alternative underlying the very title of Gadamer's work *Truth and Method*: either we adopt the methodological attitude and lose the

¹⁶ Feldman, “Some Elementary Questions”, 63-66

¹⁷ Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 214-245.

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology”, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 264.

ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of the human sciences.¹⁹

Ricoeur's hermeneutics instead attempts to incorporate the act of alienation or distancing from oneself as an integral moment on the path to appropriation. Distance becomes a necessary condition for understanding, due to the nature of what Ricoeur calls the "shattered cogito".²⁰ Since who I am is already dispersed or diffracted among conflicting institutions, works and cultures, appropriation is not only an alienation from oneself, but an encounter with oneself in other forms. Ricoeur, a close follower of the "masters of suspicion", affirms that the greatest threat to self-understanding is the narcissism of the ego. For this reason, Ricoeur reads appropriation as an act of *enlarging* the self. Both Ricoeur and Gadamer understand appropriation in terms of *concreteness* (i.e., whereas explication alone is abstract, appropriation is concrete and living), but Ricoeur's metaphor of enlargement suggests that a process of concretization is as much a dissolution of identity as a convergence - "alienation" and "appropriation" remain dialectically bound, "understanding is as much disappropriation and appropriation."²¹

However, whereas Ricoeur embraces the *distanciation* produced by an objectifying approach, he is consistent with Gadamer in rejecting the mode of rationality associated with modern technology. Ricoeur seems to differentiate between knowledge gained through distancing (for example, insights which emerge from the methods of the social sciences) that can be productively related back to a practical understanding of the world, and a technological rationality that operates according to a logic that no longer has any relation to human understanding. The distancing caused by technological rationality results in an *endless* detour with no return, since it is a type of knowledge which remains forgetful of its relation to the hermeneutic question of being-in-the-world.

Both Ricoeur and Gadamer develop the idea of practical appropriation/application in direct response to forms of rationality that they see embodied in technology, i.e., rationality that is independent of appropriation. For example, when Ricoeur is discussing globalised, economic

¹⁹ Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation", 72.

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 11-16.

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation", 85.

forms of rationality, and the negative effect that these have on our understanding of *work*, he links this phenomena to the rise of modern technology,

In a word, labor, on the level of economic society as such, appears at once as technically rational and humanly unreasonable. Moreover, the individual is dissatisfied and even torn in the labor force of modern society because he finds no *meaning* in the simple struggle against nature nor in the apology of calculating efficiency. This is so true that in advanced industrial societies, at least, meaning is sought more and more outside work, and work becomes merely a means to gain leisure time, which, in turn, is organised along the lines of the technical model of work. In brief, work, in advanced societies, has ceased to be the great educator in the ways of rationality that Hegel and Marx saw it as.²²

Practical reason and the task of interpretation involve difficult and arduous *work*, yet it is a form of work that stands radically opposed to the types of work associated with modern economic society. The conflict here, between the “technically rational” and human reason, is similar to the conflict outlined by Gadamer and Habermas. The implication is that in an age dominated by a technical/economic enframing of “labour”, we have forgotten the *hermeneutic* notion of work, which involves building a relation with the land so that truthful dwelling and *thanking* can occur.²³

Furthermore, whereas practical wisdom is bound to self-understanding and the development of a self (*Bildung*), the skill of *techne* is something that I can learn, apply, and then discard or forget. This contrast between repetition of the same (technological production) and repetition of the different, makes the subject matter of this thesis difficult. The hermeneutic concept of practice, elaborated by Ricoeur and Gadamer, is developed in order to suggest an alternative mode of engaging with the world than the one we are currently presented with through the modern dominance of science and technology. As Paulo Cesar Duque-Estrada writes, this conflict between two forms of rationality is an old one and provides the foundation for Gadamer’s understanding of practical philosophy,

One can say, in this way, that the fundamental topic which correlates hermeneutics and practical philosophy is the problem of the preservation of one type of rationality against the totalitarian tendency of another type of rationality. In the context of practical philosophy, we find Aristotle’s critique of the formal universalism of Plato’s ideas, and

²² Paul Ricoeur, “Ethics and Politics”, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 320.

²³ See Todd S. Mei, *Heidegger, Work and Being* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009); Todd S. Mei, “An Economic Turn: A Hermeneutical Reinterpretation of Political Economy with Respect to the Question of Land,” *Research in Phenomenology* 41.3 (2011), 297-326.

the useless character of the idea of the good (*idea tou agathou*) regarding the concrete demands of the “here” and “now” proper to the practical realm.²⁴

If Ricoeur and Gadamer’s view of practical wisdom is developed *against* the types of rationality they see embodied in technologies, how can these two types of reason be brought into dialogue? While wishing to maintain this timely critique of technological rationality, I suggest here that practical philosophy cannot escape the question of *technique*. Just as living, participating subjects are appropriators of tradition and future meanings, techniques, and by extension technologies, can be seen as modes of appropriating practices through offering new solutions and unanticipated possibilities for action. This means that they themselves require further appropriation and development. The resources for thinking through this relation are already present in Ricoeur’s understanding of the circle of alienation and belonging. Ricoeur himself seen texts and linguistic structures as operating through economic, technical relations of exchange and codification. A detour through such structures is necessary for any genuine appropriation to occur. If, like the text, we read technologies as reflective of living, embodied practical concerns, then they too can be seen as appropriative of life. That is, the act of designing or constructing technological solutions to practical problems is not simply a negation of the human capacity for practical reason, as the hermeneutic thinkers suggest, but also an affirmation of questions and perspectives that remain unanticipated by the ‘naïve’ perspective of a practicing, unchallenged subject.

1.2 THE ART OF HERMENEUTICS

As I have suggested above, this thesis moves in the direction of taking the alienation that hermeneutics associates with technology in a positive sense. However, two features of the hermeneutic critique outlined prevent us from doing so, since alienation is only conceived as productive for Ricoeur when it is linked to the practice of interpretation. When linked to systematic forms of oppression and de-humanization, alienation is seen as negative. The two features of the hermeneutic critique that cause us to read technology as a negative mode of alienation are, firstly (1) is the link proposed between the *interests* guiding technological production and those of scientific rationality. Linking technology to science in this way leads

²⁴Paulo Cesar Duque-Estrada, *Gadamer’s Rehabilitation of Practical Philosophy: An Overview* (Ph.D., Boston College, 1993), 2.

to the view that the concerns underpinning technology cannot be reconciled with the concerns originating in the lifeworld. The technological concerns adhere to the demands of objectification associated with scientific method, while the concerns in the lifeworld are grounded in forms of intersubjectivity and interpretation. The second (2) is the presupposition that the modes of *application* associated with technology differ from those of an artwork or text, for example. Technological applications aim towards generalizable, decontextualized outcomes, while hermeneutic applications found in aesthetic encounters are singular and bound to the context of the engagement. In order to begin to consider technologies as hermeneutic objects, it is necessary to overcome both these hermeneutic presuppositions about technologies. The first objection is overcome, as David Kaplan argues, by acknowledging the pluralistic, material nature of technological *mediation*. Furthermore, I suggest that technologies should be read as emerging from practical experience, rather than from abstract forms of reasoning.

In view of Kaplan's concerns about Ricoeur's disposition toward technology, the second subsection will highlight what exactly makes Ricoeur's hermeneutics meaningful for understanding technology. The relation between technological solutions and practical experience forms one part of a hermeneutic arc, with the other being practical re-appropriation. This leads us to overcoming the second objection mentioned above. The work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, which provides a background for Ricoeur's project, will be examined due to its acknowledgement of the role of technique in application. However, his preference for a *general* model of hermeneutic seems to sublate the question of technique. Ricoeur's hermeneutics (along with Gadamer and Foucault), in insisting on the centrality of practical appropriation, brings the question of technique back into view.

1.2.1 RELATING TECHNOLOGY TO PRACTICE

The link, established by Habermas, Gadamer, Heidegger, Ricoeur and others, between technology and rationality has been challenged by many recent approaches to technology. These approaches will be explored in more detail in Section 4, but here David Kaplan's reading of Ricoeur's work as providing resources for moving beyond a transcendental critique of technology towards an engagement with its material configurations will be highlighted.²⁵

²⁵ See, for instance, David Kaplan, "Paul Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology", *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 16.1/2 (2006): 42-56; David Kaplan, *Ricoeur's Critical Theory* (SUNY Press, 2003), 164-

Aside from the invaluable work of Don Ihde, who incorporated aspects of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology into his work on technology, there has been a relatively minor impact of Ricoeur's work on the philosophy of technology. Whereas Kaplan does not directly explore the full implications of a Ricoeurian approach to technology, he does lay out a thorough and useful roadmap of potential points of intersection between Ricoeur and questions of technology. In key ways, this thesis attempts a journey along this possible path that is gestured towards by Kaplan.

At the outset of his article "Paul Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology", Kaplan states the problematic nature of combining Ricoeur with questions of technology bluntly:

On the few occasions when Ricoeur did discuss technology, he generally agreed with Heidegger, Marcuse, and Habermas, each of whom contrasts the dehumanizing characteristics of technology and technological reasoning with more humane forms of experience and action. Ricoeur incorporated the views of these philosophers without adding much new to the study of technology.²⁶

Kaplan laments this point, because in the latter half of the twentieth century, as technology became more integrated into social life, thinking about technology shifted from a critique of the transcendental essence of technological modes of relating to the world, to an empirical approach which advocated contextual, narrative-based understandings of technologies as they operate in the lifeworld. Or, in other words, the philosophy of technology itself began to incorporate a hermeneutic approach:

The problem with [Ricoeur's] pessimistic view is that it is unoriginal, limited, dated, and false. There are too many different things we call technology to be captured by a notion of a single technological rationality that ostensibly underlies them all. The empirical approach to technology studies understands it hermeneutically and contextually: technology must be interpreted against a cultural horizon of meaning, like any other social reality.²⁷

Given the centrality of a hermeneutic perspective in many current approaches to technology, it is disappointing that there was not a deeper, more *appropriating*, reflection on technology given by the three most influential hermeneutic philosophers; Ricoeur, Gadamer, and Heidegger. Indeed, since many approaches to the philosophy of technology adopt key

173; David Kaplan, "Thing Hermeneutics", in Francis J. Mootz and George H. Taylor (eds) *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Continuum, New York & London, 2011), 226-241.

²⁶ Kaplan, "Paul Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology", 42.

²⁷ Kaplan, "Paul Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology", 49.

hermeneutic concepts (for example, the influential work of Bruno Latour which accords “narrative description” a role in its theory), a renewed examination of the nature of hermeneutics itself seems necessary in order to reflect on the conditions of much of our contemporary understandings of technology.²⁸

Kaplan demonstrates the various areas of Ricoeur’s large body of work that could be productively combined with contextual, empirical accounts of technologies.²⁹ Although Kaplan mentions a variety of areas, the key area I focus on is Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and its thesis that distancing and belonging are two separate moments of a broader dialectic of understanding. My investigations are guided, to a certain extent, by the following claim: “If the password for Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is “mediation,” then it might help us to interpret the various ways that artifacts mediate experiences – and the ways we can respond to it given our limitations.”³⁰ In particular, I focus on the configurational and disfigurational aspects of mediation, brought about by the interaction of experiencing subjects and designed artefacts.

When considered in isolation or in terms of its broader, guiding *interests*, technology can appear monolithic and threatening. However, when considered in terms of its *mediating* effects, technology becomes more unstable and uncertain. At times, devices and technologies work to productively *configure* and order our understanding of the world. They guide and shape human action. However, just as with narrative configurations, technological configurations are equally disfigurational. A technological design or solution, understood as a creative response to practical needs, proposes a new mode of action and understanding, which both disfigures prior understandings and is itself open to re-figuration through uncertain application processes. For example, according to the hermeneutic suspicion of technology, we could imagine a tractor as the product of agricultural *theory*. Whereas, an immediate encounter with and experience of using a tractor might not tell us as much, the suspicion would be that as an *optimized* mode of agriculture, it would fit within a broader technological tendency which aims to progressively rationalise a practice. However, as with narratives that emerge as distanced reflections of human concerns with temporality, I argue that we can view the tractor as emerging from the practical experience of farming - as an inventive, creative response to problems that arise within that experience. Furthermore, we can view it as both related to farming-practice, and as

²⁸ Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto’”, *New Literary History* 41.3 (2010), 471-490.

²⁹ The areas of Ricoeur’s work that Kaplan mentions are: (1) Ricoeur’s “model of the text as a paradigm for the linguistic mediation of experience”, (2) his “model of the hermeneutic arc” [between technology and society], (3) Ricoeur’s narrative theory, (4) Ricoeur’s account of the philosophical identity of the self, and (5) Ricoeur’s moral philosophy. Kaplan, “Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology”, 49-52.

³⁰ Kaplan, “Paul Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology”, 49.

differing from it, through its ‘technical’ or ‘configured’ features. It both arises from a practical experience and has a transformative effect on that practice. As a technical object it also contains its own possibilities for use that remain distinct from the initial needs and experiences that gave rise to its invention. Therefore, it presents a technical solution to a practical problem, but acknowledging the *individuality* of the solution, and even its *ingenuity*, means acknowledging its productive limitations or horizons. These horizons should not be too-quickly reconciled with the picture of technological rationality presented by the hermeneutic suspicion.

To understand the dialectical nature of the relation between technologies and practical experience, a key tension must be retained, one advocated by hermeneutic theories but often neglected empirical approaches to technology. The tension is created due to what Kaplan calls the “Romanticist legacy” of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic. It is identified as a weak point in Ricoeur’s thought by Kaplan, “The second way philosophers of technology add to Ricoeur’s work is through their challenge to the Romanticist legacy in Continental philosophy that too sharply distinguishes between persons and things.”³¹ Kaplan admits that much of Ricoeur’s work is aimed towards developing a partial reconciliation of this aporia (between explanation and understanding), but that there persists a dualism between the natural and social sciences, “From the perspective of the philosophy of technology Ricoeur remains trapped in the Romanticist legacy. Though dialectically related, persons and things belong to ontologically distinct realms.”³²

I will instead argue that this distinction needs to be maintained, as the difference between the two is the condition for appropriation. It can be broken down in various ways, and Ricoeur himself does challenge this division, but at a certain point we run up against the problem of what Ricoeur calls a “semantic dualism” between the language of persons and the language of things.³³ Kaplan argues that technology is so integrated into social life that the traditional paradigms of natural and social sciences no longer make sense; to segregate technology to the realm of “science” is to abstract it from its inherent social dimension. While agreeing with the dangers of abstraction presented by a transcendental critique of technology, the latent dualism between persons and things adhered to by Ricoeur still remains productive for thinking about the *alterity* of technological development in relation to human-based practices and traditions. My intention is to re-read this alterity as dialectically related to the formation of practices.

³¹ Kaplan, “Paul Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology”, 54.

³² Kaplan, “Paul Ricoeur and the Philosophy of Technology”, 54.

³³ Jean-Pierre Changeux and Paul Ricoeur, *What Makes Us Think? A neuroscientist and a philosopher argue about ethics, human nature, and the brain* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 14-15.

Technologies are still read as being integrated into society, but the continuity between persons and things remains problematic, precisely due to the role of mediation. For example, I will argue that the work of Gilbert Simondon (Chapter 7) provides a useful model for thinking about human-technology relations that insists on the difference between human concerns and the way that technologies develop and evolve.

Paying closer attention to the contextual, historical features of individual technologies allows us to perceive that technologies can be linked to *practices*, as opposed to abstract, theoretical interests. The hermeneutic critique remains operative, but instead becomes a way of discerning the difference between the individual, practical features of technologies, and the general, theoretical features. We will see this division presented by Ricoeur himself in Chapter 3, when he distinguishes between an understanding of psychoanalytic technique that associates it with theory, and one that associates it with practical experience.

1.2.2 APPLICATION AND THE MACHINE

Accepting Kaplan's suggestion that technologies should be understood in terms of their mediating effects, we can still ask whether this mediating process is one-sided. That is, do technologies mediate our understanding and actions in univocal, programmatic ways? This seems to be suggested by the hermeneutic suspicion of technology. Whereas artworks, texts, discourses, and so on, address and implicate us in the event of interpretation and practical negotiation, technologies treat us as mere 'users' – we navigate menu systems or interfaces in a relatively unambiguous way. As David Lewin suggests (Chapter 6), hermeneutical reasoning involves *phronēsis*, a capacity that seems to be denied by the logic of the interface, which aims to eradicate the need for deliberation and the experience of uncertainty.

Nevertheless, hermeneutic approaches themselves cannot avoid the question of *technique*. Not only are artworks and texts constructed with the aid of techniques, but the practice of interpretation itself often involves the development of a technique or method to reach beyond the immediate level of what is said. As we will see below, for Schleiermacher, hermeneutics itself was an *art* that had to be practiced. Certain works, due to their individuality, *demand* a corresponding mode of engagement from the subject attempting to know or understand them. For example, a particularly difficult piece of music, which may at first sight appear 'impossible' to play, demands of its performer the training and development of certain physical

techniques in order to perform and interpret it. Technique, understood in this sense, is the emergent outcome of practical, interpretive interactions.

Techniques seem to go against the *universality* of the hermeneutic problem, since they are often creative responses to regional questions. As the product of attempts to resolve localized interactions and engagements, they tend to be surpassed by the interpretations themselves. Ricoeur's approach to hermeneutics, however, is careful to assert the inseparability of the result of an interpretation and the *mediating* factors that lead to a particular result. The tension, between the regionality of technique and the universality of the hermeneutic problem, is an old problem for hermeneutics, treated extensively by Schleiermacher. For Ricoeur, this tension becomes a productive condition for understanding. Explanatory accounts of phenomena help us *understand better*. That is, there is a link between regional phenomena and understanding-as-whole. The art of hermeneutics consists in attesting to this relation and drawing out its implications. At first sight, this framing of hermeneutics places weight on the power of understanding to reconcile and draw together pluralized, conflicting accounts. For example, at one point Ricoeur defines philosophical hermeneutics in the following terms:

It begins by an expanding investigation into symbolic forms and by a comprehensive analysis of symbolic structures. It proceeds by the confrontation of hermeneutic styles and by the critique of systems of interpretation, carrying the diversity of hermeneutic methods back to the structure of the corresponding theories. In this way it prepares itself to perform its highest task, which would be a true arbitration among the absolutist claims of each of the interpretations. By showing in what way each method expresses the form of a theory, philosophical hermeneutics justifies each method within the limits of its own theoretical circumscription.³⁴

This "highest task" of "true arbitration" can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it could represent the task of gathering together diverse forms of knowledge and relating them to the central question of human, existential self-understanding in a totalizing way. On the other hand, it could represent the task of hermeneutics to attest to the *impossibility* of this very project (or at the very least, the *difficulty* of such a project).³⁵ Taking the thesis of hermeneutic application/appropriation seriously means that the conflict of interpretations is irreducible, and therefore gives more credence to the second of these readings. The figure of the "true arbitrator", then, would be that of a self possessing practical wisdom, i.e., the ability to perceive

³⁴ Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics", trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 15.

³⁵ The terms 'difficult' and 'impossible' are used by Ricoeur to distinguish his own approach to forgiveness from Derrida. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 457-506.

and negotiate the tension between a general rule or theory and the demands of the singular case. *Technique*, a type of regional knowledge, according to hermeneutics, should then be seen as contributing positively to the revelation of this difficult situation.

Within the history of modern hermeneutics, ‘know-how’, or technique, has been associated with the individuality of the work, rather than with generalizable knowledge. In other words, technique is more closely related to a practical understanding of truth as opposed to a scientific understanding (*episteme*). This point is raised by Schleiermacher to highlight the aesthetic or artful nature of understanding. General rules of interpretation do not suffice, due to the contingent nature of cultural backgrounds and norms which affect both the author and reader. For this reason, a “general hermeneutics” needs to include both analytical and *skilful/artful* elements. That is, a reader needs to grasp both the grammatical aspects of a work and the way that these “mechanisms” have been *applied*. All understanding involves a simultaneous grasping of rules and the significance of the rules for a particular application. Ricoeur’s own contribution to this view of hermeneutics is to claim that not only are both features *necessary*, but that the difference between the two is a *productive* difference, since rules generate new possibilities for applications, while applications generate new understandings of the rules.

For Schleiermacher, the application of the rules of language must be something different than the rules themselves, otherwise there would be an infinite regress of rule-following. Andrew Bowie points out that this argument by Schleiermacher is present in Kant (and also associated with Wittgenstein),

If general logic were to attempt to show in general how anything should be subsumed under these rules, that is, how we should distinguish whether something falls under them or not, then this could only take place by means of another rule. This rule, because it is a rule, requires new instruction from the power of judgement; and we thus learn that, whereas the understanding is capable of being instructed by and equipped with rules, the power of judgement is a special talent which cannot be taught, but can only be practiced.³⁶

It is due to the difficulty of reconciling the difference between a rule and the know-how regarding the application of the rule that Schleiermacher’s “general hermeneutics” adopts its double nature. As Kant argues, the problem of application can only be resolved by recourse to a “particular talent” developed through practice. Schleiermacher’s own term for the study of

³⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Marcus Weigelt (Penguin Classics, 2007), B 172/A 133.

the nature of application in light of the internal laws of language is *Kunstlehre*, which Ricoeur translates into French as *technologie*:³⁷

Grammatical interpretation is based on the characteristics of discourses that are common to a culture; technical interpretation is addressed to the singularity of, indeed to the genius, of the writer's message...The first interpretation is called 'objective,' since it is concerned with linguistic characteristics distinct from the author, but also 'negative,' since it merely indicates the limits of understanding; its critical value bears only upon errors in the meaning of words. The second interpretation is called 'technical,' undoubtedly owing to the very project of a *Kunstlehre*, a 'technology.' The proper task of hermeneutics is accomplished in this second interpretation.³⁸

Ricoeur's reading of Schleiermacher sees his work as being in response to Kant; an attempt to combine a formal approach to meaning with an approach which acknowledges the art of application, which is always carried out by an *individual*. What is at stake is two views of knowledge. The first type is the knowledge associated with reason and common sense, which can be formalized and discerned through grammatical analysis. The truth of this kind of interpretation is determined through the logic of correspondences, 'errors' are at the level of grammatical usage or deviations from common understandings of terms. The second type of knowledge is the knowledge associated with 'technique', which is a knowledge of the style or art of writing. This is still a comparative type of knowledge, yet the truth of the interpretation is not determined by how much a style corresponds with already existing models, but by how it *differs* from them by producing imaginative variations. Both modes of interpretation are necessary in the process of understanding in order to account for the double nature of language as a medium that is both grammatical and communicative. That fact that communication is an activity carried out by individuals within concrete cultures and societies means that grammatical structures will affect various receivers of a message differently due to these "organic" features of human life,

The aspect of endless difference in the way the world affects each organism in receptivity is what Schleiermacher refers to as the 'organic function'. Meaning and truth, though, rely upon the establishing of identities from what is given as difference in the organic function. The 'formal', in Schleiermacher's terms, is the 'intellectual' 'principle of unity', as opposed to the organic, the principle of 'multiplicity', and

³⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action: essais d'herméneutique II* (Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1986), 78-81.

³⁸ Paul Ricoeur "The Task of Hermeneutics", *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 55.

knowledge is constituted by the intellectual activity underlying the principle of unity. The formal and the organic meet in the judgement.³⁹

The intellectual principle of pure reason is never fully realized in concrete linguistic structures, due to their “organic” nature, and for this reason the truth of language can only be grasped at the practical level, and only ever imperfectly. A “technology” of interpretation is a higher-level understanding of the role of technique/application in the construction of meaning. It is a “general” guideline that claims that language-as-such (beyond the individual techniques/styles) will always be incomplete with regard to the question of “unity”. So, a “technology” of interpretation is a practical corrective to pure reason. The failure or incompleteness of pure reason in terms of linguistic presentation (the organic function of language) means that the art of hermeneutics is also the art of avoiding misunderstandings,

Reason for Schleiermacher, then, is really the potential for using the principle of unity to arrive at true knowledge, a potential which relies on the organic function as well as on the activity of the formal, synthesising capacity of the mind. Both the organic and the formal, of course, are necessary for language, which must be instantiated as object in the physical world that is given in the organic function. This means, therefore, that language blocks the possibility of access to ‘pure reason’: pure reason would entail a ‘purely formal’, ‘general’ language, but how would we ever learn it?⁴⁰

In lieu of a “general” language, a “general hermeneutics” arises as a corrective. The comparative and divinatory aspects of hermeneutics remain distinct but inseparable for Schleiermacher, and this is what makes every work of interpretation contain both regional and universal aspects. Importantly, the regional or divinatory aspects of interpretation accounts for its *worldly* character, since it is directed towards the way that language affects us as embodied, cultural agents. This, early, account of hermeneutic technique, distinguishes ‘technique’ from ‘method’ and aligns it more closely with sensitivity and skilfulness. The association of hermeneutics with technique even renders the work of interpretation itself as a “work of art”: “The complete task of hermeneutics is to be regarded as a work of art, but not as if carrying it out resulted in a work of art, but in such a way that the activity only bears the *character* of art in itself, because the application is not also given with the rules, i.e., cannot be mechanised.”⁴¹ The ambiguous nature of the *application* of language to the organic world, is what gives rise

³⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge University Press, 1998), xxi.

⁴⁰ Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, xxii.

⁴¹ Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 11.

to the need for an accompanying technique or *Kunstlehre*. Technique and the question of application are inseparable.

The later work of Michel Foucault, in its turn to a “hermeneutics of the self” and a “technique of the self”, could be seen to be a continued reflection on Schleiermacher’s division. However, whereas Schleiermacher posits a principle of unity, Foucault rejects the “generality” of hermeneutics, in favour of a practical, regional self. Like Schleiermacher, Foucault associates “techniques” with the individuality of a self, and with a type of knowledge that is produced through practical differentiation and divination, rather than through formal principles. “Truth”, for Foucault, is not a rich, universalizable principle, to be discerned using the resources of grammatical analysis (a determining of correctness or error), instead, it is something that can only be grasped through a practical transformation, for example, through the deployment of techniques of the self.⁴² In contrast to the repeatability of a general hermeneutics, the consistency of a style, gesture, or habit, brought about through repetition, produces an effect which differentiates (transforms) the self, and therefore prepares it for greater access to a regional truth. In this sense, techniques are not directed towards the production of knowledge (*episteme*), or at the production of an interpretation (as in the case of a *Kunstlehre*), they instead represent an alternative, practical understanding of truth; a “know-how” that is localized, contextualized and bound to the individuality of the practicing self within a certain epoch. Foucault inverts the project of a general hermeneutics; knowledge is inextricably linked to the techniques that gave rise to its ‘discovery’, therefore the task of producing knowledge or understanding involves the development and creation of more techniques of the self.

Ricoeur follows a similar path to Foucault, in that he rejects the Schleiermacher’s project of a “general hermeneutics”, at least at the level of philosophical method or reflection.⁴³ In place of Foucault’s self that transforms itself through habit and technique, Ricoeur’s “regional” model is of the self before the text. For Ricoeur, the task of interpreting oneself (or the other) must move from the psychological attempt to know the ‘who’ of the text (the author), towards a practical appreciation of the *what* of the text. The enterprise of Dilthey and Schleiermacher “remains fundamentally psychological...because it stipulates as the ultimate aim of interpretation, not *what* a text says, but *who* says it.”⁴⁴ Instead, “the text must be unfolded, no

⁴² Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49.

⁴³ Although he suggests that the *hope* for some kind of unified or general perspective remains an important, non-philosophical, resource for the work of philosophy.

⁴⁴ Ricoeur, “The Task of Hermeneutics,” 60.

longer toward its author, but toward its immanent sense and toward the world it opens up and discloses.”⁴⁵ Hermeneutic *appropriation* supplements any reconstruction of the past or the author. There can be no understanding of the *who* in absence of the mediating distance of the text that stamps any interpretation with the mark of practical appropriation. Ricoeur differentiates his approach from that of Gadamer - whereas Gadamer emphasizes the centrality of *Sprachlichkeit*, or subject matter, that is at play in a process of understanding, Ricoeur instead adopts the idea of a *Schriftlichkeit*, or matter of the text. That is, Ricoeur places “what is said”, the goal of interpretation, at a distance from the subject. The text, more so than the “Word” or speech, stands for the “fundamental characteristic of the very historicity of human experience, namely, that it is communication in and through distance.”⁴⁶ Placing the aim of interpretation, the retrieval of what is said, at a distance means that any work of interpretation entails some kind of movement or transformation. What is to be understood is never directly within my grasp, since it always caught within a process of mediation.

The point here is that, although the language of technique and technology is dropped from Ricoeur’s appropriation of Schleiermacher, his model for hermeneutics embraces the challenges of distanced communication and mediation as productive factors in our understanding of the world. The key ideas that are retained from Schleiermacher are the notions of the centrality of practical application for hermeneutics, and the idea that understanding is a *task* that involves some degree of cultivation or effort.

Technological artefacts, according to the hermeneutic critique, mediate our action and interactions in a less ambiguous, less organic way than language, therefore eradicating the need for interpretation in an application. However, I will argue instead that, like language, technology possesses its own organic character, revealed through the problems of practical application. Just as Ricoeur conceives linguistic mediation as necessary in the task of hermeneutics, technological mediation is necessary in the construction of practical meaning, even if this means that it disfigures or problematizes practical understanding. The hermeneutic link between *technique*, in the sense of an art, or style, but also in the sense of a method of interpretation that responds to the organic character of language (a *Kunstlehre*), and *application* is key for attempting to understanding the *technique*-character of modern technologies, i.e., the way that at the practical level their interpretive character is revealed.

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, “The Task of Hermeneutics,” 61.

⁴⁶ Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation”, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 72-73

On the other hand, aside from the recognition of the crucial role of technique in the art of discerning meaning, Schleiermacher also helps emphasize that an understanding of an individual technique depends on a comprehension of the internal dynamics of the language-systems that mediate these applications. These grammatical or ‘mechanistic’ features of language cannot be neglected in a hermeneutic account of language. So, there is a productive tension, between the fully-formed ‘mechanisms’ of language and the singularity of individual applications of these mechanisms. Understanding the latter involves training and practical experience while understanding the former also involves a detour through grammatical, technical analysis.

The art of hermeneutics, then, involves a degree of cultivation and self-transformation, with the aid of techniques, set against the background of a grasping of the internal structures of language systems themselves. Hermeneutic application is never simply the intuitive or divinatory work of a singular individual, it also incorporates explanatory moments. In this way, grasping the significance of an artwork or text, does not exclude considerations of its mechanisms and technologies. There is a productive opposition established, which will be discussed further in the next chapter, between interpretations of the internal *meaning* of a work (produced through its grammars and structures) and the skilful, experienced grasping of the *significance* of this meaning within singular contexts and horizons. Hermeneutics, understood in this sense, is the art of drawing out the significance already present within the machine.

For example, in conversation with Gadamer, Ricoeur discusses the role of distanced analyses of the deep structures and mechanisms of texts. He wishes to highlight the productivity of these detours in the process of transforming our understanding of the works themselves. As an example, he discusses a Beethoven symphony: “It’s not lost time to see how the first phase and the second theme work out in the composition, and finally in the coda – that does not spoil our pleasure. On the contrary, the understanding of the underlying structure comes also to underlie our pleasure.”⁴⁷ Detours into the technical or structural features of a work lead to *better* understandings, since the detour itself generates new perspectives and interpretations. If I want to understand the truth of a particular work better, it is not enough to approach it with a ‘general’ understanding. Instead, I must engage with it on its own terms, terms which may at first be unfamiliar to me and will therefore require training and education. A naïve understanding would not necessarily be that of a listener unfamiliar with the compositional

⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer”, in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection & Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 237.

techniques of the Classical and Romantic periods of music, but rather that of a listener who disavows the work-character of the piece and appreciates only the individual *behind* the work (Beethoven). In this way, Ricoeur's emphasis on the importance of detour through the structures and mechanisms that make up a work, shifts the hermeneutic emphasis from the *genius* of the author to the *ingenuity* of the work.

Are these technical or mechanistic features of works and languages only meaningful because they reflect the concerns of authors and readers, albeit indirectly? What stops us from moving from an appreciation of the ingenuity of a symphonic technique employed within a work towards an appreciation of a technological design that, beyond its utility, exhibits a degree of inventiveness and creativity that could only be the product of a living, questioning human agent? Reconceiving devices and technologies as the products of practical experience allows us to see how understanding them or appropriating them can potentially move beyond the level of utility and functionality. Their *work*-like character needs to be brought to the fore.

In this way, the difference between a technique and modern technological devices can be seen to be bridgeable. Ricoeur's hermeneutics, following Schleiermacher, embraces interpretation as a double-sided process. Technological applications can be conceived along similar lines. There is, on the one hand, the internal logics and dynamics of individual machines, which work together to produce a certain function or application. However, since no technological device or design is total (just as there is no 'pure' language there is no 'pure' technology), the applications of technologies presuppose a level of interpretive skill or competence on the part of the user. Just as the applications of language systems involve degrees of experience and training, technological products educate their users in their applications using various techniques – supplementary instruction-manuals, online forums, customer service, interface overlays, and even at times the know-how needed to use the technology is built into the design itself. However, these prescribed forms of application that accompany the design of the technology often encourage 'literal' interpretations of the machine. It is also possible to widen the scope of technological application by inquiring into the design and configuration of devices themselves, to go against their 'intentional' use, in order to respond more appropriately to the singularity of an invention. Designers, engineers, computer scientists and so on, aim to gradually improve machines in this way, while hackers, hobbyists, artists and everyday users often investigate the internal design in order to produce unanticipated applications. These alternative, singular forms of application and interpretation attest to the *symbolic* features of

individual devices, i.e., their latent ambiguity that is often concealed by everyday, literal interpretations.

Even accepting the difference between a traditional understanding of technique as a skill or art, integrated meaningfully within a practice, and an understanding of modern technology as more *displaced* from practices, through its adherence to its own logics or essences, it is possible to read this difference as productive. For example, a positive feature of learning a craft or technique is that it challenges me productively, I am forced to transform my habits and cultivate dormant capacities and understandings. However, technological devices and machines, whilst displacing this working-through character of technique, challenge me in a different way. They are challenging because, through their displacement and alienation, their applications are more *uncertain* and open.

With Ricoeur's understanding of the distancing-appropriation dialectic as a guideline, I suggest that we can move beyond the hermeneutic suspicion of the colonizing force of technological forms on the lifeworld. Viewing technological constructions as the outcome of practical engagements sets up an alternative, dynamic relation between practical understanding and technology. At the regional level, individual technological designs and solutions are seen to be both displacements and reflections of particular human practices. However, these constructions, which are made according to their own logics and concerns, never totally resolve the problems of a practice, even if they present themselves in the guise of totality. This displacement both marks the incompleteness of individual technologies and the possibility for new, unanticipated applications. At the broader level, we have a hermeneutic circle that moves between historical understandings, technical practices, and historical circumstances. Novel, unforeseen circumstances and situations, which are the outcome of a historical movement that cannot be encompassed by a technology (or any distanced perspective), overturn established technical solutions, or unfold previously unnoticed features of technologies in new ways. By characterizing technology as a form of *distanciation*, as opposed to a radically distanced, alien form of rationality, we are able to grasp the fundamental question-answer structure that governs both human understanding and technological evolution.

The notion of distancing also acts as a corrective to the features of technology that the hermeneutic distinction between the practical and the technical helps to highlight. These features are related to the tendency to present localised or 'regional' technological designs as *universal* solutions. If we read technologies as the inventive outcomes of historical and social reflections and interactions, then their dependency on this prefigurative space of experience

cannot be neglected. The notion of ‘generalizable applications’ remains problematic for hermeneutics, whether it be in relation to interpretations of a text, another person, a function, and so on.

To understand the non-hierarchical, relational nature of the distancing-belonging dialectic further, Ricoeur’s work on linguistic structures (Section 2) and technique (Section 3) will be examined. These areas of Ricoeur’s work help highlight the inseparability of regional and general features of understanding. They allow us to develop a way of thinking about distancing that reconceives self-*alienation* as a positive and necessary feature of self-understanding. Distancing becomes an integral feature of hermeneutic consciousness, meaning that the task is not to radically oppose it to belonging, but to multiply it as a way of uncovering hidden possibilities in hermeneutic and technological agency. I focus on three key areas of Ricoeur’s work where distancing is integral to practical understanding; his approach to the symbol, which articulates the fragile, perpetual dialectic at work between signs and symbols, functionality and ambiguity, that underpins human understanding; his readings of Freud, which insightfully articulate both the foundational ambitions of psychoanalysis to provide a ‘technique’ by which the human mind could become conscious of itself, whilst at the same time showing how this insight is only achievable through the confrontation of this ambitious technique with the, far more murky, experience of practical understanding; and the field of narrative, the human technique *par excellence* for making sense of time. The ideas articulated by Ricoeur in relation to these phenomena, serve as the basis for then considering the uncertain relationship between technologies and their practical applications.

SECTION 2: APPLICATION AND DISTANCIATION

Section two focuses on Ricoeur's distinctive contribution to a hermeneutic account of application. For Ricoeur, hermeneutic application involves mediating between a concrete apprehension of meaning, and a reflective awareness of the structures and paradigms that condition this meaning. In relation to language, the two examples that Ricoeur studies to examine how a reflective awareness emerges are Husserl's phenomenological reduction of signs, and a structuralist account of language systems. Ricoeur is critical of both approaches, but his criticisms are aimed towards recovering the productive features of their analyses at the practical level. Signs and structures *aim* toward order and univocity, but can never fully achieve this aim. This is due to the fact that while *distanciated* from the world (in their aim toward univocity), they also *belong* to the world through their *communicative* function. The communicative features of language systems mean that their objectivity needs to be rethought as in terms of intersubjectivity. A hermeneutic account of *belonging*, expressed here in terms of the *symbolic* dimension of language and the *events* of language-use, acts as a corrective to a purely phenomenological or structuralist account of language. Nevertheless, Ricoeur also stresses that, once a hermeneutic understanding of belonging is incorporated into a phenomenological or structuralist perspective, the distanciation of these perspectives can also become a productive way of transcending a naïve understanding of the world.

2. SIGNS, STRUCTURES AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

This chapter seeks to articulate what I believe is distinctive about Ricoeur's approach to the concepts of practice and belonging, and which will later become relevant for thinking about the ways that technological forms of distancing can be seen to be integral to practical understanding. As already mentioned, in contrast to both Gadamer and Heidegger, Ricoeur seeks to incorporate an explanatory approach into the general project of human understanding. I will argue here that the way that he achieves this is through *relativizing* the idea of explanation, so that the distance we associate with methodological approaches becomes a *reflective distance*. I focus on two ways that he does this. The first way (1) is through a critique of the phenomenological account of the 'ideal' sign. For Ricoeur, Husserl's aim of providing a ground for science and philosophy fails due to the communicative dimension of the sign. This allows Ricoeur to retain the notion of a sign, but free it from its idealist connotations. Instead, it is placed in dialectical relation with the *symbol*. Signs retain their function, which is to clarify, but this function is relativized through its relation to ambiguity, which persists across all intersubjective, historical communication. Secondly, (2) Ricoeur's readings of structuralism perform a similar critique. The idealistic attempt of structuralism to provide an atemporal model of language is rejected based on the concrete experience of intersubjective communication, which is constituted not only through structural features, but also as a living, creative *event*. Both these critiques draw on the hermeneutic notion of the power, or centrality, of application. I have chosen these particular areas of Ricoeur's work since the *univocal* nature of the sign, and the determining role of structuration, is mirrored in the way hermeneutics conceives of technologies. Therefore, Ricoeur's highlighting of the crucial role that these linguistic tendencies or operations play in relation to the practical task of understanding will be repeated in the relationship between technologies and practices.

Across both sections, there are two key features of hermeneutic application that are relevant for a consideration of the relationship between technologies and practice - the autonomous nature of language and the incomplete nature of language. That is, Ricoeur aims to account for the *dual* nature of language as being both closed (fixed, structured) and living/dynamic (open to interpretation). Hermeneutic approaches must embrace both features - the contingent, variable features of language-events, grounded in the understanding of a singular self or community, and the structural, explainable aspects of linguistic systems and traditions.

Ricoeur's use of the hermeneutic concept of application aims to combine these two approaches. Since language possess its own set of logics or protocols, lending it an objective character, meaning is a property of language itself rather than something we can attribute to a speaker or outside ground. However, as a dynamic or open medium of intersubjective communication, language remains an incomplete object. Every attempt to map or codify a system of linguistic relations fails unless it takes into account the temporal aspect of linguistic utterance. In response to this inability to grasp language in its totality, the idea of hermeneutic application lends a sense of temporary completeness to our understanding of language. If a speaker can nevertheless utter meaningful statements in view of the impossibility of understanding/explaining language as a whole, then the speaker must be *bringing* something to language in order to render it significant within a particular context.

Ricoeur's understanding of the 'sign' prefigures his later work on writing and discourse. He begins from a phenomenological standpoint, and problematizes it using insights drawn from a hermeneutic conception of meaning. Like writing, signs are firstly the result of an attempt to fix or record the 'said' (*Aus-sage*) of the 'saying' (*Sage*). The structure of this relation is phenomenological – the act of saying possesses an intentionality so that “inscription, in spite of its perils, is discourse's destination.”¹ However, due to the autonomous nature of the sign and structures, explored further below, the distance produced by writing/the sign, in turn negates the intentionality of the act of saying, and opens up a world of its own. In this way, the encounter with a text or system of language is firstly an encounter with the 'said' – what the text projects or its 'world' - which results from the system or order of writing itself, rather than the intentionality of the author. Importantly, the distancing effect of signs and writing is hermeneutical rather than phenomenological, that is, it is a result of the *mediating* or *communicative* aspect of language, rather than being *ideal*. In this way, 'distance', for example the kind of distance that might be associated with phenomenological reduction or with a scientific attitude, is seen as a perspective that *complements* (but in doing so also problematizes) a concrete understanding, rather than serving as a superior viewpoint.

¹ Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 142.

2.1 DISTANCE AND COMMUNICATION

Ricoeur's early turn to hermeneutics is marked by its investigation of the *symbol*. Symbols, in Ricoeur's specific use of the term, are formally defined by their semantic ambiguity. That is, they possess a double, or composite, meaning – a primary, literal meaning, and a secondary, figurative meaning. The hermeneutic approach to language, which accounts for this symbolic dimension, arises at the limits of the phenomenological method, which Ricoeur claims is concerned primarily with *signs* – univocal expressions of meaning. Husserl's phenomenological method, which through its reduction tends towards abstraction, cannot account for the phenomena of symbols, which remain *concrete* for Ricoeur, i.e., bound to a specific tradition, culture, practice, place, individual, etc., by way of their figurative meaning. Any abstracted account of the symbol denies its living, revelatory nature.

Outside of the formal definition of the symbol as semantically ambiguous, it may be useful to provide a more concrete example of the symbolic. For example, a drop of wine spilt on a white tablecloth can be read in two ways. Taken literally, it is simply a sign of what has occurred, a material process governed by the laws of physics, chemistry, and so on, or perhaps it serves to differentiate the colours 'red' and 'white' that now appear on the surface of the table. However, as an *image* (symbol) it also carries further connotations. It can also signify, for example, a *stain*, along with the historical, religious, psychoanalytic, etc., connotations that the image of a stain may bring forth. There is a difference between the literal meaning and the symbolic for Ricoeur, although both are inseparable. Whereas the literal meaning can be *explained* (up to a point), to understand or apprehend the symbolic meaning one has to have already been conditioned to see it (historically, culturally, experientially). Importantly, this does not mean that the symbolic meaning is secondary or a mere cultural derivative of the literal meaning, instead, Ricoeur sees it as at once being both highly contingent and fundamental, "There is no symbolism before man speaks, even if the power of the symbol is grounded much deeper."²

Language, for Ricoeur, is made up of a mixture of signs and symbols, i.e., of systematic or structural relations (signs) and their residues (symbols). In order to understand language a hermeneutic phenomenology is required – a mixed approach which recognizes both the structural (unbound, autonomous) and concrete (bound) aspects of language.

² Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics", trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 13.

Since it is Ricoeur's approach to the role of explanatory methods (phenomenological reduction, structuralism) that distinguishes him from his hermeneutic contemporaries, these aspects of his thought will be explored in the following subsections. Ricoeur agrees with Heidegger that philosophical 'explanations' (for example, metaphysical theories) can remove us from the direct encounter with being that is found along the "short-route of understanding".³ Nevertheless, he deems these 'detours' necessary. There are multiple reasons for this approach, which continue to inform Ricoeur's philosophy throughout his career, and are therefore difficult to enumerate. Within the context of this thesis, I will focus on the reasons for Ricoeur's "long route of understanding" that relate to the question of practice and practical understanding.

Heidegger's above-mentioned problem with philosophical explanation/clarification (as Ricoeur sees it), regarding the "distance" it introduces, is both lamented and *embraced* by Ricoeur. It is lamented because the direct confrontation with the truth of being (*aletheia*) encountered along the 'short-route of understanding', which provides an existential grounding (or un-grounding) for thought, remains perpetually out of our grasp. However, the attempt to explain the structures mediating our experience itself *animates* the quest for understanding. Ricoeur conceives the distance introduced by the detour through the mediating structures of experience and action as a *reflective* distance. New questions and insights that were previously concealed now emerge and feed-back into our understanding. Practical understanding involves both the way that an individual apprehends or participates in the world, and the knowledge that the individual possesses of the structures that mediate the interaction. Ricoeur views both these types of awareness as distinct and irreconcilable. As in a football match, the perspective of the spectator differs from that of the player. The spectator can speculate about the game from a distance, perceiving broader strategic patterns, and so on. The player, through their direct participation in the game, possesses their own unique perspective, which allows them to engage with the practice of football in a more direct, unmediated way. We typically expect the types of skills and practical wisdom possessed by the players to differ radically from the distanced speculations of the fans – it would be difficult to imagine a knowledgeable fan stepping down off the stands to join a professional match and doing well. However, Ricoeur's approach, which acknowledges the difference between participation and distanciation, yet stresses the interrelationship *across* the difference, would view both spectators and players as *belonging* to the wider practice of the game of football. The players belong in a more immediate and participatory sense, but the spectators belong through their distanciation. Just as writing is the

³ Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics", 6.

“destination of discourse”, commentary is the destination of the game – through commentary the game is realized not only as an event but as an *enduring* event, it is repeatable in a different, but related, form.

The fundamental difference between distancing and participation means that practical self-understanding is conceived of as an interminable *project* for Ricoeur. The “I” of the self is both a subject and an object. It is composed of two incommensurable forms of understanding – embodied, practical wisdom and reflective, distanced knowledge-of. Both forms remain distinct but are reciprocal (we explain more to understand better). Due to this dualistic understanding of selfhood that sees the self as both something we *are* and something we *have*, the category of self-understanding or self-identity for Ricoeur is mixed – the self is not as a substance or entity but is a *work* or *task*, and therefore as inherently practical.

Again, this approach, which embraces both embodied, practical knowledge (belonging) and reflective, theoretical knowledge (distancing) as constitutive of the practical self, means that Ricoeur’s notion of practice is distinctive. Using Ricoeur’s work as a foundation, I suggest that practices should not be understood in the sense of embodied, repeatable procedures, for example, a well-practiced figure skater whose movements are only achievable through embodied, habitual knowledge. Instead, practical understanding includes both this sense of practice, and the reflective, theoretical dimension outlined in Ricoeur’s account of explanation or distancing. Therefore, although repetition is crucial in the formation of practical understanding, Ricoeur’s account includes the added dimension of the pattern of repetition (or spiral of understanding⁴) that takes place through the back-and-forth movement of explanation and understanding (participation and distancing). This form of repetition is one which strengthens understanding by differentiating it; the distance gained through reflection is both an alienating distance and a *productive* distance.

This is one of the ways that Ricoeur advocates the “long route of understanding”. It is important to mention these points here as they will become important later when considering the way that technologies produce distancing effects in relation to on-going practices or traditions. It is also important since the following subsections consider Ricoeur’s account of the “sign”. As I mentioned at the outset, Ricoeur claims that hermeneutics is defined in relation to the symbol

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 72.

(ambiguity). For Ricoeur, this approach alone is limited, since symbols do not appear in a ‘direct’ unmediated manner. They always appear within an economy or system of relations. Therefore, he advocates a hermeneutic phenomenology. This distinguishes him as a hermeneutic thinker, since he is not only concerned with the problems of ‘saying’ (poietic showing) or of ‘Truth’, which would be the realm of the symbol, but also with the question of the how these moments of saying are *constructed* through the structures and paradigms that *mediate* this saying process. As I have outlined above, the reasons for this relate to his conception of practical self-understanding. Below I will examine further the reasons for this approach by considering further the distinction between signs and symbols, and structures and their applications, and why it is important to take both these separate but related aspects of language into account when considering the question of interpretation (taken in the broad sense to include application).

2.1.1 THE HERMENEUTIC PROBLEM OF SIGNS

One of the key ways Ricoeur defines the sign is by its *function*, which is to *clarify*. Clarification involves abstraction, mapping, codifying, building up a system, etc. Considered by way of its function, the sign is an ‘object’, a signifier. It is fixed and reliable, it enables communication and fosters agreement. A fluid and effective exchange of univocal signs is necessary for the daily work of social beings. They help establish a commonality of sense and, in a technocratic manner, are necessary to produce social, as well as linguistic, order. Considered in isolation, signs are univocal, which means that they do not need to be interpreted, their meaning is immediately apparent. They work because they are ‘invisible’ as signs, and this invisibility is crucial for their effect. If one were to spend too long deciphering or trying to understand the full scope of the reason for the traffic light to be green, or for the speed bump at *this* location, our everyday worlds would become dysfunctional. In a sense, signs *respond* to this dysfunctional aspect of the human, the interpreting animal. For example, the well-known Nudge theory argues that our actions and choices should be guided through external, invisible sign-systems (‘choice architecture’) because, left to our own devices, we tend towards biased and irresponsible choices (at the collective level).⁵

⁵ Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness* (Penguin, 2008), 12-14.

The other key aspect of the sign, though, is its relation to the symbol, i.e., to its *origin* and *end*, or its *concrete* functionality in the world. The symbolic meaning is the latent or figurative meaning of a sign, a meaning that requires interpretation and deciphering. Whereas signs, as described above, work through striving to eliminate the need for interpretation, the symbol is fundamentally ambiguous and provokes interpretation. However, although signs may not *immediately* give rise to interpretation they do invite suspicion. It may not be possible to question a sign on its own terms, by way of its rational/univocal place within a structure, but it is always possible to question it with regard to either where it arises from (e.g., a particular/historical cultural milieu) or where it leads us (what the sign means for me, or us, as we appropriate it). These two temporal ‘directions’, which are often separate from a sign’s intended meaning, correspond to the two inseparable hermeneutic attitudes for Ricoeur: suspicion and trust. The authors of *Nudge* implicitly appeal to a hermeneutics of hope/faith in their argument; we accept, often blindly, handing over control of our decisions to a *fairer* procedure, because we trust in the value of fairness and, in this case, in the ability to arrive at a just outcome using rationally constructed procedures.

Nevertheless, what first appears in its ready-to-handedness as fixed, univocal and determined in advance, is surrounded on both sides by uncertainty and interpretation. For example, the interface (Chapter 6) appeals to this logic of the sign in its design. I will argue, though, that by articulating the dialectical relation between the apparent certainty of these devices and sign-systems, and the symbolic, uncertain lifeworld from which they emerge and in which they operate, we can begin to see the inherent instability of all functionality. This instability returns us to ourselves, as it is only we who can ground an interpretation in an attitude of either hope or suspicion.

One of Ricoeur’s reference points for articulating his understanding of the sign is Husserlian phenomenology. Ricoeur is both critical and appropriative of Husserl. Rather than rejecting phenomenological notions of method and certainty completely, Ricoeur instead demonstrates the way that all methods and techniques encounter the need for a ‘hermeneutic supplement’. No system of signs or ideas is total, meaning that a structuralist account will encounter opacity and ambiguity at its limits. Therefore, interpretation, which is a *practical* activity perpetuated by participating subjects stands in relation to technique. However, Ricoeur’s use of the term grafting should not mislead us as to the order of events. Interpretation does not come afterward; similar to Derrida’s understanding of the writing-supplement for speech, hermeneutics is also

an *originary* grafting. Hermeneutics and phenomenology presuppose one another.⁶ As with many areas of his work, Ricoeur takes up this, at first sight, ‘vicious’ circularity and aims to show how it is virtuous. The confrontation between hermeneutics and phenomenology leads to a deepening of both; practical understandings are enriched by reflective, distanced descriptions, and theories, methods, and techniques are unfolded through practical applications; they are deepened by becoming more *effective*.

Ricoeur founds his hermeneutic project not on the sign, and the difference of the sign, but rather on the ‘symbol’, and its excessive ambiguity. To an extent, he accepts the structuralist claim that signs can operate in a univocal way within a fixed system of identification, and then proceeds from this assumption to show that symbols fundamentally complicate this picture by introducing the problem of ‘surplus’ meaning which disrupts structures. The effect of the symbol on language and structures is dialectical; the symbolic allows for innovation to emerge from within tradition, rather than marking the point at which the structure disintegrates completely. A hermeneutic method still allows for some semblance of continuity even in the radical disfiguration and re-figuration of traditions and structures.

For Ricoeur, Husserlian phenomenology marks an important turning point for a philosophical investigation into signification and meaning. Outside of a solely logical or semantic investigation into the sign, and the process of signification, Husserl’s attempt to understand signs within his broader phenomenological project proved to be crucial in understanding the relation between linguistics and lived experience, between intentionality and the materiality or ‘givenness’ of the lifeworld. What is most relevant to Ricoeur is the failure of the phenomenological project to provide a ground or foundation for all thought.

In Jacques Derrida’s reading of Husserl, the phenomenological attempts to escape metaphysical speculation and, in particular, Platonism (in *The Origin of Geometry*), are shown to result in a paradox. Due to Husserl’s starting point, the method of phenomenological reduction, he arrives at a theory that still privileges *presence* over absence or alterity. Ricoeur, too, demonstrates that we need to abandon the phenomenological attempt to ground all meaning in relation to the identity of the constituting ego. However, instead of replacing ‘identity’ and ‘sameness’ with pure difference, Ricoeur tries to complicate the notion of

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics”, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 23-51.

identity itself by ‘grafting’ the idea of interpretation onto the phenomenological method.⁷ From a Derridean point of view, Ricoeur remains within the confines of a discourse on identity and on the ideality of meaning. For example, as with Husserl, Ricoeur does occasionally define ‘writing’ as the condition for the ‘repetition of the same’:

Like Husserl, Ricoeur subsumes transference under *that which* is transmitted. Discourse can be identified and reidentified as the same: the repeatability at stake in Ricoeur’s account of the text concerns the repeatability of the same meaning. With these similarities in mind, Derrida’s questions with respect to Husserl become questions with respect to Gadamer and Ricoeur as well: Are they capable of doing justice to the primordial contamination of writing and meaning if they consider interpretation as a process that aims at manifestation of the same meaning or subject matter?⁸

However, even though Ricoeur emphasizes that there is a continuity or relation between distance and belonging, for example between writing and discourse, he also works to demonstrate that it is a relation that maintains a difference or distance in its operation. In this way, there is indeed a repetition of the ‘same meaning’, but we could term it, instead, a *non-identical* repetition.⁹ Writing repeats meanings which emerge through discourse, but it does so in another register. Therefore, as Ricoeur emphasizes, writing is not only a vehicle for repetition, but also projects its own world. The aim of interpretation is never to repeat the meaning exactly, but to articulate it in a way that is most *appropriate* to the distance that governs all interpretation.

One of Husserl’s main contributions to the tradition of philosophical semiotics comes at the beginning of *Logical Investigations* when he distinguishes between two distinct types of signifying functions: “expression” (*Ausdruck*) and “indication” (*Anzeichen*). “Expressions” are related to intentional meaning, whereas “indications” are forms of signification in which the intentional meaning is absent. This definition links expression of meaning to speech acts and, “Such a definition excludes facial expression and the various gestures which involuntarily accompany speech without communicative intent, or those in which a man’s mental states achieve understandable ‘expression’ for his environment, without the added help of speech.”¹⁰ Even if one were to interpret unintended signs, such as our involuntary ticks, body language,

⁷ Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics”, 20-21.

⁸ Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language: Heidegger, Ricoeur, and Derrida on Disclosure and Displacement* (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 94-95.

⁹ Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity: The Literary Agenda* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), 105.

stutters, and so on, the interpretation would not be of the same order as the interpretation of someone's speech, which is more expressive of the persons inner state at the level of 'meaning', "[our involuntary manifestations] 'mean' something to [the observer] in so far as he interprets them, but even for him they are without meaning in the special sense in which verbal signs have meaning: they only mean in the sense of indicating."¹¹ Expressive signs are linked to the ideality of meaning, the meaning that can be separated from its material conditions of presentation. For Husserl, both types of signification, indication and expression, are in a state of "entanglement" (*Verflechtung*),

As such, the distinction sometimes leads Husserl to describe their relation as an "entanglement" – an "interweaving", or "contamination" – and even that such an entanglement is a "*de facto* necessity". In fact, the distinction between the two is only effected *de jure*, and *in language* – which is itself always already "infected" by the "contamination" of the two.¹²

It is the communicative function of language that binds expressivity to indication, since an expression initially appears to the other, and vice versa, through indication. However, in order to investigate expressivity free from the contamination of indication, Husserl posits a bracketing of the communicative function. He claims that expressions can be separated from the process of indication in the case of isolated mental life, "*Expressions function meaningfully even in isolated mental life, where they no longer serve to indicate anything.*"¹³ As Derrida points out, there is a certain linguistic contradiction here in that, "By a strange paradox, meaning would isolate the concentrated purity of its *ex-pressiveness* just at that moment when the relation to a certain *outside* is suspended."¹⁴ In other words, a methodological account (presentation) of *meaning* (*vouloir-dire*) can be misleading – it claims to have located the essence of meaning (what it *expresses*) by abstracting it from the contingent, variable network of *indications*, and yet in doing so it deprives meaning of its *meaningfulness*, i.e., its function of not only "expressing", but of indicating, communicating and affecting. In hermeneutic terms, acknowledging the communicative or expressive dimension of language leads to the idea of appropriation.

¹¹ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 105.

¹² James K. A. Smith, "A Principle of Incarnation in Derrida's (*Theologische?*) *Jugendschriften*: Towards a Confessional Theology", in *Modern Theology* 18:2 (April 2002), 222.

¹³ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 103. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 22.

For James K. A. Smith, the main thrust of Derrida's reading of Husserl is to *ethically* raise the question of the *other* against phenomenology.¹⁵ Derrida's readings of Husserl focus to a large extent on a critique of Husserl's valuation of speech over writing, "When Husserl considers expression, his focus is on *speech* because it is in speech that we find *intention*: a speaker, by means of a sign, means to communicate something to a listener."¹⁶ With Husserl, we find a repetition of the oft repeated Platonic suspicion of writing as secondary to speech. For Derrida, Husserl is not really concerned with an analysis of signs themselves, despite his initial attempts to distinguish between expressive signs and signs as indications. This distinction gets lost in Husserl's privileging of intentional meaning, "For it is more and more clear that, despite the initial distinction between an indicative sign and an expressive sign, only an indication is truly a sign for Husserl."¹⁷ What results is an avoidance of 'otherness', of the 'contamination' associated with writing and indication, in favour of a phenomenological analysis of what is most present, or most my 'own'. The voice, as the most 'pure' or uncontaminated vehicle for expression then becomes designated as my 'own' space, free from contamination,

So 'expression', in a sense, does not employ signs. And yet, expression remains linked to the *voice* and speech. The result is what Derrida calls 'phonocentrism': the determination of being as presence of ideality and the valorization of *speech* as the site of presence (in contrast to writing) and therefore immediacy.¹⁸

Instead, for Derrida the seduction of language, or the contamination of intention by signs, is not an *external* problem for intention, but rather is constitutive of meaning itself. By refocusing on the problem of signs themselves Derrida shows how every reading and every interpretation is itself contaminated and open to the ruptures and singularities associated with the dissemination of intention through material signs,

Every reinterpretation or reactivation of a text has to deal with unaccountabilities and undecidables. These elements are indeed added by language as writing, but they cannot be opposed to a language devoid of these elements: a language purified by a philosophical *logos* or a hermeneutic decipherment might be the dream of (hermeneutic) philosophy but is never a present actuality.¹⁹

¹⁵ James K. A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2005), 30.

¹⁶ Smith, *Live Theory*, 29.

¹⁷ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 42.

¹⁸ Smith, *Live Theory*, 33.

¹⁹ Van der Heiden, *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language*, 96.

In Ricoeur's account of the sign, he indeed differs from Derrida in that he accords its functionality a crucial place in the project of understanding meaning. Yet, his dialectical approach to signs and symbols still attempts to overcome the problems of a presence that would be free of the contamination of writing that Derrida identifies in Husserl. The contamination of ideal meaning by its material expressions, which Derrida stresses guarantees the failure of a "hermeneutic decipherment", is re-read by Ricoeur as leading to the hermeneutic problem of application. As with Schleiermacher's account of the 'organic' function of language discussed in Chapter 1, the hermeneutic appropriation responds to the impossibility of extracting (deciphering) a 'pure' meaning from language (its *vouloir-dire*), turning instead to the search for interpretive resolution at the practical level.

In contrast to Derrida, Ricoeur's work is marked by an attempt to remain faithful to key insights arising from phenomenology. Ricoeur is critical of "Husserlian idealism,"²⁰ but wishes to demonstrate that both hermeneutics and phenomenology are conditions (presuppositions) for one another. What will be most relevant for this thesis is Ricoeur and Derrida's mutual rejection of the telos of the Husserlian approach to language, which involves a privileging of the 'logical' or the 'univocal' in signification. Both thinkers respond similarly to this feature. For example, Derrida writes:

being interested in language only within the compass of rationality, determining the logos from logic, Husserl had, in a most traditional manner, determined the essence of language by taking the logical as its telos or norm. That this telos is that of being as presence is what we here wish to suggest.²¹

And Ricoeur:

Of course, Husserl would not have accepted the idea of meaning as irreducibly non-univocal. He explicitly excludes this possibility in the First Investigation, and this is indeed why the phenomenology of the *Logical Investigations* cannot be hermeneutic.²²

The suspicion aimed towards a reduction of language to univocity mirrors the hermeneutic suspicion of technological rationality. Indeed, it may be asked whether by reducing technology to its univocal essence, hermeneutic thought denies the *communicative* feature of technological mediation, in the same way that Husserl bracketed the effects of the sign.

²⁰ Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics", 23.

²¹ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 8.

²² Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics", 15.

Understanding how Ricoeur responded to the problems of Husserl's idealism is key to understanding how to respond to Ricoeur's own reductive comments on technology. Ricoeur's way out of the Husserlian problem of *Verflectung*, of the contamination of meaning by systems of indication, is first of all, like Derrida, to accept that the entanglement is inescapable. This is because, for Ricoeur, language is always "bound" (to contexts, cultures, lifeworlds, etc.) and, also, language always precedes or gives rise to thought. Ricoeur not only denies that there could be a reduction of meaning to pure "expression", but he also adds that the phenomena of language is more complex than the problem of signs suggest, due to the semantic weight of symbols. Symbols fundamentally complicate the Husserlian notion of meaning since they are defined by their "double meaning". Even at the intentional level (the level of *vouloir-dire*) they can mean two opposing things at once. Signs are bound in the sense of the "entanglement" outlined above, but symbols are bound in a double sense:

Bound *to* and bound *by*. On the one hand, the sacred is *bound to* its primary, literal, sensible meanings; this is what constitutes the opacity of symbols. On the other hand, the literal meaning is *bound by* the symbolic meaning that resides in it; this is what I have called the revealing power of symbols, which gives them their force in spite of their opacity. The revealing power of symbols opposes symbols to technical signs, which merely signify what is posited in them and which, therefore, can be emptied, formalized, and reduced to mere objects of a calculus. Symbols alone *give* what they say.²³

Therefore, although Ricoeur speculates that signs can be reduced to their formal structure and become 'technical', symbolic language is in principle non-reducible to a technical language of concepts or operative signs, since their logic prompts 'reflection' and not just identification. Languages not only have an ideal sense, but also a *practical* sense. It is through practical usage that languages are both communicative and structural.

Although, the question of intentionality is still key for Ricoeur in the consideration of semantic meaning, what symbols complicate is the idea of a transcendental ego that constitutes meaning. Intentionality, as revealed through the analysis of symbols, is not only a property of subjects, but is also an internal aspect of configured language. Later this will be crucial for Ricoeur's development of the notion of the autonomy or world-like character of linguistic works, whose intentional relations move beyond the intentionality of the "author". Ricoeur is suggesting that the way in which meaning unfolds in language is *independent* of a central constituting ego. The

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 31.

symbol's 'power' or 'force' always exceeds, and ultimately de-centres, any attempt to bracket the logical or univocal meaning. In contrast to Derrida, it is not that the sign is conditioned by an absence which would make any attempt to render it transparent or fully 'present' fail, it is that even the presented meaning of the symbol always escapes full conceptualisation, and in a sense resides *elsewhere*, outside of the phenomenological field constituted by the individual ego.

2.2 STRUCTURATION AND PARTICIPATION

As we have seen, whereas Ricoeur and Derrida are both critical of Husserl's aims, Derrida takes a more radical approach to the problem of signs and their meaning. Both agree that meaning can never be fully disentangled from the materiality of its expression, since the 'interiority' of meaning proposed by Husserl denies its inherent *communicative* function. Meaning must exist in and through the world if it is to be meaningful in the world, i.e., have an effect. However, for Derrida, the logic of indication (*Anzeichen*) underpins, and surpasses, what Ricoeur calls the referential function of language. This difference hinges on the status of the 'other' in hermeneutics and deconstruction. For Derrida, the other (never) appears by way of the material trace, whereas for Ricoeur the referential function of language acts as an opening for the possibility of reconciliation and understanding. Ricoeur takes the epistemological route; we can never know for certain whether the world to which language refers is a common, shared one, yet the idea of a referential function acts as a productive regulative idea in the task of understanding. Both thinkers accept the unsurpassable fact of *distance* in any communication process, but whereas for Derrida this distance guarantees that a communication will never arrive at its intended destination, for Ricoeur distance is conceived as *distanciation*; the condition for a belonging which is struggled for and worked-through. As Richard Kearney notes, the difference here is between a "perhaps" (hermeneutics) and "perhaps not" (deconstruction) in relation to whether Godot will arrive.²⁴

²⁴ More specifically, this division is made to distinguish between Kearney's anathesim and Derrida's atheism: "Beckett confessed that the 'key word of my work is Perhaps,'" and if anatheism reads this to mean "perhaps Godot will come," deconstructive atheism is more likely to respond, "perhaps Godot won't come." Kearney, Richard, "Derrida and Messianic Atheism", in Edward Baring and Peter E. Gordon (eds), *The Trace of God: Derrida and Religion* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2015), 207.

Whereas both Ricoeur and Derrida are in strong agreement when it comes to the *difficult* nature of language, arising due to the materiality of its expression, they diverge when it comes to the role of the work of interpretation. To over-simplify their approaches: whereas Derrida stresses the *disfigurative* work of language (indication) on itself, Ricoeur stresses its *configurative* aspects. It is by cohering into the semblance of a ‘whole’ that language realises/actualises its capacity for productive understanding.

However, the configurative power of language, which remains threatened but never fully eclipsed by disfiguration, is not attributed to the author. It remains a property of language itself, understood as work. In a sense, it remains the promise of the *technique* that underpins the construction (configuration) of language, since techniques involve assemblies and configurations. Ricoeur’s first step in developing this thesis was, as we saw above, putting forward a critique of a purely phenomenological account of the ‘sign’, through resituating it within a network of indications. In this way, ‘meaning’ is no longer synonymous with the intention of a speaker. Yet, neither is it endlessly deferred. The “network of indications” is, Ricoeur posits, still decipherable, using the resources of structuralism, “Separated from speaking subjects, a language presents itself as a system of signs.”²⁵

Within the context of this thesis, the role structuralism plays in relation to language will be taken as analogous to the role that a technique plays in relation to practice. The structuralist approach, whose conclusions are in many ways redundant (this will be discussed further below), nevertheless represents a certain way of posing questions to language. It embraces methods of the natural sciences, and develops “a kind of intellectualism which is fundamentally antireflective, anti-idealist, and antiphenomenological.”²⁶ However, Ricoeur’s re-reading of structures as processes of *structuration* means that it is possible to account for both the *practical* and the *configurational* aspects of meaning. That is, it will become possible later to re-situate technologies and techniques, understood as modes of structuration and configuration, alongside practical understandings of the world. In the final part of this chapter I also discuss the ways that this relation is a *productive* one, through reference to the work of Wolfgang Iser, and a study conducted on architectural students to examine the relevance of Ricoeur’s theory for understanding the productivity computational moments in the design-process.

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 31.

²⁶ Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, 33.

2.2.1 MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

The antireflective mode of inquiry that structuralism adopts is Ricoeur's primary reason for rejecting it as an adequate account of how language works. Yet, what it succeeds in articulating is the *autonomous* nature of linguistic structures. We can no longer rely on practical understandings alone, which arise due to our participation in a linguistic community, but instead must also approach language in the mode of distanciation, since language, through its structures and techniques, remains distinct from speaking subjects.

Structuralism's weakness lies in the way it hierarchizes synchronic models over diachronic events of usage, and therefore tends towards abstraction and neglects the concrete nature of words. Ricoeur does not wholly reject the idea of structure derived from synchronic models, rather he insists on the conflictual and dialectical relation between linguistic systems and the lived, concrete, and eventual nature of linguistic utterance. For this reason, he adopts the term *structuration* in place of 'structure', to better reflect the dynamic nature of linguistic systems.

It is because linguistic systems are dynamic that they are *usable*. Whilst the opposition between synchrony and diachrony is illuminating at a conceptual level, as a way of explaining the difference between a system and its practical applications, in *practice* these two aspects of linguistic structures are intimately intertwined in the *word*. The word, a communicative medium, contains both 'eventual' and 'structural' characteristics. It possesses both a *significance* and a *meaning*. For Ricoeur, these terms represent two stages of comprehension; we are capable of grasping both the meaning-content of the word, its structural value, as well as a more innovative, apprehension of the words significance in *this* context, to *me*. In relation to a text, drawing out its 'significance' means, "the active taking-over of the meaning by the reader – i.e., the meaning taking effect in existence."²⁷ If we want to account for all aspects of meaning we also need to account for its concrete *effects*. In this way, 'application' or linguistic usage, is not something simply 'added on' to a structure, as if there was a complete system of language and sign relations which we then apply in order to communicate and, correspondingly, it also means that linguistic models, while useful explanatory tools, can never

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutik und Strukturalismus. Der Konflikt der Interpretationen I*, trans. Johannes Rüttsche (Munich: Kösel, 1973), 194. Quoted/translated by Iser in: Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 151. Alternative translation by Peter McCormick – "Two thresholds of understanding then must be distinguished, the threshold of 'meaning,' . . . and that of 'signification,' which is the moment when the reader grasps the meaning, the moment when the meaning is actualised in existence." Paul Ricoeur, "Preface to Bultmann", in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 397.

fully abstract or separate themselves from instances of usage. Much like the way that the metaphor of an interface or computer ‘user’ is misleading (Chapter 6), so too is the idea of a language ‘user’. Instead, Ricoeur’s statement here regarding “meaning taking effect in existence”, points us towards the inseparability of structures and their applications. Meaning and significance cannot exist independently of one another, a linguistic ‘structure’, or ‘structuration’, only ‘exists’, in a concrete sense, when it is in use. There is no fixed meaning prior to use, only potential points of significance. Similarly, significance cannot appear as such in the absence of perceived/comprehended meaningful relations. Wolfgang Iser highlights this point well when discussing Ricoeur’s distinction between meaning and significance in relation to the act of reading:

Meaning is the referential totality which is implied by the aspects contained in the text and which must be assembled in the course of reading. Significance is the reader’s absorption of the meaning into his own existence. Only the two together can guarantee the effectiveness of an experience which entails the reader constituting himself by constituting a reality hitherto unfamiliar to himself.²⁸

As we can see, meaning and significance remain distinct but inseparable. The act of combining both, in this case achieved through the experience of reading, is a *transformative* activity; an alteration is effected in the reader’s consciousness through being brought into contact with an unfamiliar reality (the world of the text). Crucially, it is not that the mind of the author is unfamiliar to the reader, but that the *reality* presented in the text is unfamiliar. That is, ‘meaning’ is not something shared between two psychological egos, the author and the reader, but is located within the network of indications (world) of the text itself. Furthermore, meaning appears, in its concreteness, through appropriation and is linked to the idea of self-transformation. Since transformation refers to a process of alteration, from something familiar to something new, there is always something unfamiliar or uncanny about meaning, since it is the meaning of the reality of the work that provokes self-transformation. In order to understand appropriation as an active bridging of the familiar and unfamiliar, it is important to grasp this unfamiliar status of meaning which plays a role in constituting an appropriation and distinguishes it from mere projection or reception. In the phenomenological sense, meaning is both related to and distinct from the intentionality of an ego, “The notion of meaning...adds to

²⁸ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 151.

intentionality a relation to something other – a relation of otherness. A relation of otherness obtains when something “applies to” or “is applied to”.²⁹

Through emphasising the transformative potential of meaning, hermeneutics remains distinct from semantics; meaning is not only something identifiable through analysis, it is also something that potentially affects us individually. The implications of this approach to language, which advocates the distinctness but inseparability of structures and practical lifeworlds, will be explored throughout the thesis, with emphasis on how structures and systems depend on activities of appropriation. For now, it is necessary to explore further the other side of the relation, that is, why appropriation and self-understanding depend on structures that are unfamiliar or distant.

Scott Davidson has argued that Ricoeur’s focus on structure and structuralism has become outdated in light of developments in literary theory.³⁰ In place of the structuralist paradigm, he argues hermeneutics should instead opt for the intersectional paradigm. I believe that this is a good way to counteract the homogeneity of the text when viewed through a structuralist lens. Through this paradigm shift, the text ceases to become an interconnected system of significations, and instead becomes a cacophony of competing voices, whose different volumes are regulated by social power dynamics. In this case, the reader’s task is to listen more closely to suppressed or misrepresented voices. This task is more ethical (practical). It is guided by the social and political concerns of the critical reader, rather than the pseudo-scientific concerns of a structuralist analysis. However, I do not think we can discard the notion of structure entirely. More precisely, I do not think we can discard Ricoeur’s own appropriation of structure as *structuration* entirely. A hermeneutic account of structuralism never argues that the text in-itself is a closed totality. As the above quote by Iser highlights, the work of reading/interpretation involves the assemblage of the *implied* referential totality of the work.

Although there is indeed a level of violence implied in this understanding of hermeneutics, a violence that could be productively counteracted by incorporating insights from intersectional theory, the idea of structure is necessary to account for the fact that a work always *presents* us with something, a limited range of readings. It is this limitation, or pattern, of the work that constitutes its ‘horizon’, and therefore the possibility of a fusion of horizons.

²⁹ Jean-Pierre Changeux and Paul Ricoeur, *What Makes Us Think? A neuroscientist and a philosopher argue about ethics, human nature, and the brain* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 122.

³⁰ Davidson, Scott, “Intersectional Hermeneutics”, in *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur*, eds. S. Davidson and M. A. Vallée (Springer International Publishing, 2016), 159-173.

As Davidson notes, Ricoeur's readings of structuralism, although critical, never leave structuralism behind. For example, towards the end of "Structure and Hermeneutics" Ricoeur writes: "I assert that there is no recovery of meaning without some structural comprehension."³¹ In the context of Ricoeur's essay, the reasons for this are based on the deficiencies of a "naïve" (unmediated) participation in symbolic meaning. On the one hand, Ricoeur criticises structural, atemporal models on the basis that they disavow the symbolic "saturation" of the models themselves; every explanation is founded through prior understandings or lived relations. For example, commenting on the interpretation of the "rites of eagle-hunting in the Hidatsa tribe" in *The Savage Mind*, Ricoeur writes,

the constitution of the high-low pair, from which are formed all the differences, including the maximum differences between the hunter and his game, provides a mythological typology only on the condition of an implicit comprehension of the surcharge of sense of the high and the low. I grant that in the systems studied here this affinity of the contents is in some sense residual – residual, but not null. This is why structural comprehension is never without a degree of hermeneutic comprehension, even if the latter is not thematised.³²

The idea of a "symbolic residue" at play in every system of representation is central to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the symbol and is what gives rise to a conflict of interpretations. In this way, understanding the symbolic residue (internal hermeneutic comprehension) of all structures is necessary for understanding why they always remain incomplete at the conceptual or analytic levels, and instead can only be resolved at the level of practical judgment.

However, the symbol itself cannot appear *as* symbolic (and, in particular, as *conflictual*) independently of its appearance as surplus/residue in these different signifying systems. Structures provide a differentiated articulation of symbols by incorporating them in an "economy of the whole".³³ This economy, understood against the background of the interpretations and narratives of an "ordered community" avoids the false extremes of what Ricoeur calls (in this essay) "imagination" and "allegory". The term "imaginary", here, is taken from Edmond Ortigues, "A single term can be imaginary if one considers it absolutely, and symbolic if one understands it as a differential value, correlative to other terms which limit it

³¹ Ricoeur, "Structuralism and Hermeneutics", 57.

³² Ricoeur, "Structuralism and Hermeneutics", 56.

³³ Ricoeur, "Structuralism and Hermeneutics", 58.

reciprocally”.³⁴ Separated from its role in particular structures, which as we see is also an aspect of its *valuation*, the symbol’s overdetermined richness can lead “naïve symbolists to impertinence and to complacency”.³⁵

In these senses, the notion of structure is necessary to account for the phenomena of a conflict of interpretations, and as a point of detour which would avoid a naïve elevation of singular terms taken independently of their place within “ordered economies”. An act of appropriation that does not take into account the reflective, structural awareness that always accompanies it is in danger of misunderstanding the act as purely subjective or individualistic. This process is one of *demythologization*, and is crucial for understanding how hermeneutics conceives of novelty. Striving for novelty and innovation occurs against the background of structural comprehension, and in this way an explanation and investigation into structure is integrated into the emancipation from particular structures or traditions. This dynamic is also what links a deconstructive hermeneutics of suspicion with an appropriating phenomenology of the sacred.

Ricoeur expands on this dialectic between structures or systems and the practical renewal of these systems in “Structure, Word, Event”.³⁶ On the one hand, ‘structure’, as defined by structuralism, serves as a foil so that Ricoeur can present an alternative understanding of discourse. On the other, Ricoeur does not discard the notion of structure entirely. Instead, he aims to transition from the ‘ideal object’ of structuralism, an atemporal and fixed set of relations, towards an understanding of structure as a dynamic process. The mistake of structuralism was not necessarily its casting of language as an ‘object’, but its elevating of this object to the status of an absolute object. For Ricoeur, language has a structural autonomy, but its autonomy is that of the phenomenological *thing*, a concrete entity,

That language is an object goes without saying, so long as we maintain critical awareness that this object is entirely defined by the procedures, methods, presuppositions, and finally the structure of the theory which governs its constitution. But if we lose sight of this subordination of object to method and to theory, we take for an absolute what is only a phenomenon. Now the experience which the speaker and listener have of language comes along to limit the claim to absolutize this object.³⁷

³⁴ Edmond Ortigues, *La Discours et la Symbole* (Paris: Aubier, 1962), 194, Quoted in Ricoeur, “Structuralism and Hermeneutics”, 59.

³⁵ Ricoeur, “Structuralism and Hermeneutics”, 60.

³⁶ Ricoeur, “Structure, Word, Event”, trans. Robert Sweeney, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 79-99.

³⁷ Ricoeur, “Structure, Word, Event”, 84.

Here, Ricoeur suggests that the objectifying gaze of the social sciences can be useful as long as a “critical awareness” is maintained regarding the limitations of this perspective. In Chapter 5, Peter-Paul Verbeek’s similar objection to transcendental approaches to technology (which would include many of Ricoeur’s own comments) will be raised. It will be argued that, just as language-as-thing is revealed not only through the theoretical perspective but through the actual “experience of the speaker and listener”, technologies also need to be understood from the perspective of the experience of users and interactors. Ricoeur’s criticism of the structuralist negation of this fact can be potentially applied to transcendental accounts of the essence of technology, as Verbeek demonstrates.

Symptomatic of the absolutizing tendency of structuralism is a semiotic account of the sign, which is built on Saussure’s system of distinctions; *langue-parole*, signifier-signified. In this account, a sign is defined by way of its absence from the thing it refers to, i.e., it is no longer a thing *in* the world. It stands outside, or at a distance to, the world of things. Its difference is an *immanent* difference; the sign is different in-itself, both from the thing it refers to and from the other signs in a structure. Ricoeur, by contrast, wishes to restore the transcendence of the sign; its capacity to refer back to the world. The referentiality of a sign can be seen as a gesture of transcendence if we reconceive the ‘distance’ between sign and thing as an intermediate, negotiable distance, as opposed to an ‘absolute’ distance. The sign both is and is not related to the thing it refers to. It is, as structuralism has shown, part of a finite system of differences (*langue*), and can be accorded a place in a dictionary. However, it can also be applied in an infinite variety of ways through practical usage. This, second, transcendent aspect of the sign comes from its function within a sentence, the fundamental unit of discourse. Its practical usage within a sentence reveals that “the sign is not only that which is lacking to things, it is not simply absent from things and other than them; it is what wishes to be applied, in order to express, grasp, apprehend, and finally to show, to manifest.”³⁸

Outside of the sentence, “the sign says nothing”³⁹; a lexicon is a system of potential meanings and is lacking in semantic weight. On the other hand, Ricoeur also insists that this logic (potentiality-actuality) works both ways. A word, or sign, is also capable of surpassing its role in the event of discourse through its relation to a system, which it has the power of operating on, “But it [the word] is more than the sentence from another point of view. The sentence, we

³⁸ Ricoeur, “Structure, Word, Event”, 91.

³⁹ Ricoeur, “Structure, Word, Event”, 92.

have seen, is an event; as such, its actuality is transitory, passing, and ephemeral. But the word survives the sentence. As a displaceable entity it survives the transitory instance of discourse and holds itself available for new uses.”⁴⁰

As usual, Ricoeur advocates the in-between position; signs are both explainable and understandable. We explain signs using notions of structure, and understand them through events of usage. Both approaches are seen as valuable and interrelated; it is only through an event of actualisation that a sign’s intention to ‘say something’ is fulfilled, albeit in an indeterminate and sometimes unexpected way, and it is only through structures, traditions, norms, that an event in turn becomes actualised *as* event, rather than a ‘transitory/ephemeral’ moment. This dialectal approach to signs and their usage is captured concretely in metaphors, which are types of signs that work, or operate, on the basis of this logic.

To repeat Ricoeur’s claims about structuralism: firstly, structures are carriers of potential *meaning*; yet meanings also have concrete, practical, *effects*. These effects appear through the work of interpretation, a work that includes appropriation by a participant or subject. Secondly, these effects are *transformative*; both participants and structures (or structuration processes) are transformed through interpretation. This transformation is an innovation; a new configuration emerges from a sedimented tradition. There is a fundamental distance or difference between a participant and structures, which allows for concretization to become a dynamic, transformational, process. In this way, meaning, an aspect of the value of structures is something ‘other’ or unfamiliar, something which ‘stands-against’ the participant as something they must confront, rather than something identifiable or catalogable. Significance, in contrast, is the concrete realisation of meaning against the background of symbolic understandings. If we think about technology along these lines, as a structuration process, then we see that its essence only comes into existence (becomes concrete) through practical usage by subjects and participants. Often, this process is less of an interpretation than a simple ‘operation’ or using of the technology, but the point is that this relation has the potential to be destabilized, due to the distance between the ordering, structuring activity of a technology, and the appropriating, transforming activity of a participant.

⁴⁰ Ricoeur, “Structure, Word, Event”, 92.

2.2.2 THE SPIRAL OF UNDERSTANDING

One last point must be mentioned about Ricoeur's account of the dialectic between distance and belonging, explored above in the relation between signs and symbols and structuration and participation. It concerns the *nature* of this relation. Ricoeur aims to demonstrate the *productive* aspects of a mode of interpretation which accounts for both the *meaning* and *significance* of language. Both types of analysis or interpretation not only presuppose one another, but enrich one another by developing insights in unanticipated directions. Ricoeur famously asserts that "to explain more is to understand better".⁴¹ This statement, at first sight, places him in opposition to Gadamer, who famously claims that "we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all*."⁴² We could say that this is one of the reasons that 'truth' and 'method', according to Ricoeur, are presented as alternatives - the mode of interpretation associated with method is radically different from that of truth or direct participation/engagement. An understanding or insight which remains within the bounds of a method can never be reconciled with an understanding gained from a direct experience. For Ricoeur, on the other hand, both attitudes are related to one another. However, it is not simply, "we explain, to understand", it is "we explain *more*, to understand *better*", i.e., the terms 'more' and 'better' suggest a mediational relation between the two modes, rather than a direct one. Our understanding of the world remains perpetually caught between the two perspectives, which means, on the one hand, the task of understanding is potentially interminable, but, on the other, we are capable of drawing on resources gained from both explanation and understanding, and of relating them to one another.

One way to think about the relation between the *more* and the *better* of Ricoeur's dictum is through Wolfgang Iser's use of the term *recursion*.⁴³ For Iser, differing subject matters and contexts call upon varying registers or frameworks of interpretation. The subject matter and the register of interpretation mutually influence one another interminably so that, again, what is at stake for hermeneutics is not necessarily a disclosing of a prior meaning, but a practical recognition of the types of meanings which emerge from this interaction or tension itself. The

⁴¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), x.

⁴² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 1975), 296.

⁴³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2000).

act of making distinctions, inherent in any course of explanation, is an entirely practical procedure,

the act of distinction lies at the foundation of any description. The most fundamental operation is that of distinguishing the 'it' to be studied from its background. A distinction emerges out of the observer-community that decides the sense in which a distinction is performed. Thus we have physical boundaries, functional groupings, conceptual categorizations, and so on, an infinitely variegated museum of possible distinctions.⁴⁴

Distinctions establish boundaries which can then be explored to find out what is entailed if boundaries are crossed. Importantly, "Distinctions allow us to conceive as unities what they have separated, and these tend to become reciprocal foils for one another. [Francisco J.] Varela calls these unities systems, whose internal structure and external relations present themselves as targets for exploration."⁴⁵

Following the systems biologist Francisco J. Varela, Iser suggests that the nature of the interaction is not "cybernetic" (with the explanation acting as an external control for the subject matter, or *vice versa*), but *autopoietic* – the relation is productive and self-generating. An "autopoietic machine" or system is a set of distinctions whose boundaries are constantly renegotiated without recourse to an external 'essence' or 'identity' of the system. Autopoietic systems instead generate their own identities internally. It is not a simple assembly of components, but rather "operates as a process that produces its own components, which, through their reciprocal interpenetration, bring forth a dynamic network."⁴⁶ This process of internal exchanges which generates new forms or subject matters, and which Varela himself likens to a 'conversation', is explained by the idea of recursive looping.

The hermeneutic strength of these explanatory metaphors of system and recursion is that rather than professing to provide direct and unmediated descriptions of the world as it is, they work precisely by the persistence of a gap between system and the actual world. If reality as a structured order were to exist, systems as a mode of construing it would be redundant. Therefore, Varela states:

⁴⁴ Francisco J. Varela, *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York: Elsevier, 1979), 107.

⁴⁵ Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 100.

⁴⁶ Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 101.

All of this boils down, actually, to a realization that although the world does look solid and regular, when we come to examine it there is no fixed point of reference to which it can be pinned down; it is nowhere substantial and solid. At best the world can only be disclosed as an emerging phenomenon, to be fathomed by recursively operating systems.⁴⁷

Crucially, “For this reason, we are bound to reflect on the recursivity of these explanatory constructions, and hence what we call the “observer community” becomes of paramount concern.”⁴⁸ So, not just the exactitude or epistemological validity of a systematic representation is of interest, but also the ways in which it is presented, which reference points are discerned, which selections are highlighted by the observer community, and so on. Ricoeur’s own emphasis on the relation between explanation and understanding means that what is at stake in an explanation is often not what it *represents*, but what it *presents* us with, since the insights gained from reflection are always grasped against the background of hermeneutic questions of *application*. If we view a system or structure as an ordering of elements and their relations, then earlier forms of hermeneutics aimed to understand how these orderings left traces of the individual minds or intentions ‘behind’ the structures, or how particular forms of ordering aimed to represent certain natural phenomena better. However, if we conceive of systems as also being *presentational*, then the system becomes less of a representational medium for understanding, but rather a form of ordering which allows for the ‘emergence’ of new meanings into the world. These (what I am calling) presentational aspects of systems and structures means that the task of understanding is not simply about interpreting what has already been given, but rather about understanding life and systems as recursively unfolding processes.

An example to illustrate the productive nature of the explanation-understanding dialectic (and, by extension, the relation between signs and symbols, and structures and practical usage), can be found in a study conducted by Gürer, Özkar, and Çağdaş.⁴⁹ Their study investigates the role that ‘computation’ plays in design activities, with ‘computation’ taken in the broad sense to include the *explanatory* moments in design practices – the way that creative moments or insights that emerge from within a design process are related to more general rules or frameworks regarding principles of design. Drawing on Ricoeur’s work, they argue that these explanatory or computational reflections are inseparable from the ‘play’ or ‘understanding’ of

⁴⁷ Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 108-109.

⁴⁸ Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 109.

⁴⁹ Enthem Gürer, Mine Özkar, and Gülen Çağdaş, “A Hermeneutical Sketch of Design Computation”, *METU Journal of The Faculty of Architecture* (32:1), 165-183.

the designers. That is, design computation does not exist ‘outside’ of the practical, embodied, interpretive experience of design, but is integral to the overall process, “this paper considers computation not as an isolated and external structure borrowed and used by the designer but rather as a part of the activity in practical regard which is inseparable from design acts.”⁵⁰ Ricoeur’s model of the hermeneutic spiral of explanation-understanding is their reference point for their experiments – we begin with naïve understandings, which we attempt to formalise through explanation, these explanations then generate new understandings, which in turn lead to further explanations, and so on.

Using Ricoeur’s model, they argue that computational moments are not simply ways of monitoring, codifying, etc., the work. Instead, due to the projection-character of language, reflections work to open new possibilities of play and engagement. The particular mode of reflection/computation they focus on is writing – subjects in the study are given design tasks, with one group asked to record their operations in writing after each decision, and the other group asked to provide a written account of their decisions only at the end. They explore the claim that:

Writing (in action) offers both a fixation for our ways of seeing the world in an explanatory way and a network of possibilities for our future acts. Thus acting accompanied with writing can both bring sophistication to a naïve understanding since writing concerns articulation of acts, ideas etc. and determines fixation levels to operate on for future acts.⁵¹

The results of their study suggest that the integration of writing/computational moments into the design process enables the emergence of new meanings and pathways for design-actions,

the more design actions are externalized by writing (and inevitably by reading), the more meanings are uncovered in writings and carries to future actions and writings...Computation does not only involve bringing a design situation or action in a rule-based form. It also involves interpreting something as an eventuality.⁵²

The interplay of writing (distanciation) and action (play, belonging), allows ‘novice’ designers (the subjects of the study) to develop a deeper awareness of their practical understanding and explore new perspectives on design that could only have been grasped by translating their

⁵⁰ Güner, Özkar, and Çağdaş “A Hermeneutical Sketch”, 169.

⁵¹ Güner, Özkar, and Çağdaş “A Hermeneutical Sketch”, 168.

⁵² Güner, Özkar, and Çağdaş “A Hermeneutical Sketch”, 179

intuitive relation with things into a more formal, reflective language. This means that we should think about computational moments of design not as tools for avoiding thinking (by automating, or providing fixed rules to follow), but as partners in the creation of meaning, “computation is emphasized as an act that augments designer activities and thinking rather than automating them.”⁵³

Recourse to structural models and, more generally, the sign, is necessary in the attempt to clarify and understand better. However, this effort introduces a *distance* between the world, in its symbolic richness and ambiguity, and our explanations of it. This distance, for Ricoeur, is not absolute - signs and process of structuration also contain resources for *future* applications and actions. Application is a mode of re-situating structural meanings in the lifeworld, albeit in a new and re-configured way.

The next section will examine the way that Ricoeur applies a similar logic to the field of psychoanalysis, which more explicitly raises the question of *technique*. Again, Ricoeur is critical of an absolutizing sense of psychoanalytic technique and theory, but, situated alongside practical, intersubjective understanding, psychoanalytic technique becomes a useful framework for disclosing features of the self which cannot be anticipated at the level of intuition alone, since psychoanalysis suggests that our conscious understandings are affected not only by our practical understanding of the world (relations of meaning), but also through underlying forces and drives which are better understood using a framework that embraces the “technical” features of the human (an “economics of desire”). Continuing from the above discussion, within the context of psychoanalysis technique is read as being related to practical understanding through the way it recursively interacts with it.

⁵³ Gürer, Özkar, and Çağdaş “A Hermeneutical Sketch”, 179.

SECTION 3: HERMENEUTIC TECHNIQUE

Although the hermeneutic concepts of application and appropriation are central to 20th century hermeneutic thought as a whole, we have seen that Ricoeur's work is distinctive in its attempt to thematise the role of *distanciation* in relation to appropriation. This means that, although application is as central to Ricoeur's work as it is in Gadamer's or Heidegger's, it remains ambiguous for Ricoeur. Application/appropriation is a product of both the practical understanding of an embodied individual and the distancing effect of the text. Therefore, it remains a *mixed* and incomplete process, since the two perspectives explored by Ricoeur, *distanciation* and *belonging*, are theoretically irreconcilable.

In spite of the irresolvable tension between the two perspectives, Ricoeur nevertheless works to trace points of productive interaction between them. For Ricoeur, *distanciation* and *belonging* are conditions for one another. As was outlined in the previous section, structures and events are distinct but inseparable, the act of rendering something significant is always achieved against the background of a broader, structural meaning that remains operative. Similarly, structures are open to reinterpretation through individual acts of appropriation that can permanently alter the shape of these structures. Both these operations are *poietical* for Ricoeur, they do not offer theoretical resolution since the tension between distance and belonging still persists, but they do offer practical, interpretive resolution.

In this section, I consider two ways that the theoretical aporia between distance and belonging is rendered productive at the practical level. The first is in the case of psychoanalytic experience, while the second is in relation to narrative understanding. Both cases, as I read them, place emphasis on the role of artifice or technique in the process of understanding. When discussing psychoanalysis, Ricoeur makes the important distinction between positive and negative senses of technique. Psychoanalytic techniques and theories, when applied at the 'cultural' level, are seen by Ricoeur as tools of adaptation and domination. They reduce the human person to a 'thing', controlled by desires and drives, which can in turn be controlled by psychoanalytic method (and by extension; advertisers, propagandists, and so on). However, in the context of analysis, which is a dialogical, intersubjective scenario, psychoanalytic techniques are instead read by Ricoeur as a productive dialectical counterpart to practical self-understanding. The thing-character of the unconscious is still thematised, but in the context of analysis its practical elements are highlighted. It only becomes meaningful through the activity

of a living, intersubjective dialogue. This crucial distinction between taking psychoanalytic technique in isolation, on the one hand, and preserving the productive difference between interpretation and technique, on the other, will become useful for thinking about how to conceive of technologies in Section Four. I suggest that this, dialectical approach to technique, counts as a *hermeneutic* account of technique.

Furthermore, Ricoeur's account of narrative mediation thematises the productive relation between a *work* and practical understanding. Narratives are productive for Ricoeur because they convincingly combine two types of temporality – the time of *muthos* or *emplotment*, which resembles cosmological time, and the living durational time of action, reflected within the structures of narrative as well as in its relation to *mimesis*₁, the prefigurative space of action from which narrative draws its content, and *mimesis*₃ the refigurative space of reading and application. The first time, the time of emplotment, or the simple order of events and their causes and effects, can be compared to the understanding of time that critical hermeneutic approaches associate with technology. Time, in this account, is revealed through the objectification of the world, i.e., through representing it as independent of a living subject who constitutes it. In this way it can be reduced to its logical structure and even 'controlled' through the use of various technologies (from calendars to microwaves). The alternative, phenomenological account of time stresses the interrelationship of subject and world in the disclosing of time. Time, in this account, is durational, flux-like and non-linear. These two perspectives on time will be explored with reference to Lorenzo C. Simpson's book *Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity*.¹ For Simpson, the time of technology, in modern societies, threatens to overthrow a durational understanding of time, which is necessary for meaningful participation in practices.

Ricoeur's account of narrative, which argues that both understandings of time are productively mediated in the narrative form, offers a way out of what he sees as an aporia between these two understandings of time. The time of emplotment, when placed in dialectical relation to the mimetic activity of narrative, is seen, not as a de-personalizing, controlling attitude, but as a framework through which an *alternative* temporal reality can be constructed. Narrative modes of expression, which combine artifice and intelligibility, demonstrate the ways that a technique can be seen to be at once autonomous and open to interpretation. Not only do narratives need

¹ Lorenzo C. Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

to be placed in relation to the reader (*mimesis*), as in the case of psychoanalytic technique, but the idea of an *integrity* of technique also emerges through an account of narrative. That is, narratives, through unfolding a world of their own, introduce a distance which renders an encounter with this world an encounter with the strange or unfamiliar.

These aspects of Ricoeur's work present an alternative understanding of *technique* that dissociates it from the hermeneutic critique of modern technology, whilst also emphasising the tension that remains between hermeneutic understandings of meaning and the artificial nature of technique. The *distance* associated with *method* and modern technology is re-read as distancing, thus opening a space for a consideration of both the distinctness of techniques and their relation to practical understanding. For example, Ricoeur distinguishes the positive, dialectical understanding of psychoanalytic technique from the idea of method in behavioural psychology, a characterization that resembles Simpson's critique of technological time. The 'distance' associated with the methods of behavioural psychology and modern technology is rejected in favour of a middle position which places psychoanalytic technique and the narrative work at a *relative* or relational distance from human understanding. In both cases, the key concept that allows for a technique to be reconceived as operating at a *reflective* distance in relation to practical understanding is the hermeneutic idea of application, which highlights the dialectical, working-through character of the technique-practice relation.

These understandings of *technique* aim to highlight its *practical* and *variable* nature. Furthermore, the *differentiating* effect of technique is retained for Ricoeur; it is related to practical understandings because it lies at a distance from them, in the form of another register. Techniques do not directly disclose meanings, they *indirectly* mediate our practices. Therefore, the meanings and relations that are disclosed are a product of both the techniques used and the practical understandings of the subjects engaging in the task of understanding. Narratives, for example, are not only capable of reflecting or mirroring our actions and capacities, they also challenge us by presenting new possibilities for action and understanding.

3. TECHNIQUE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

For Ricoeur, any study of Freud, or of psychoanalysis more generally, needs to take into account the crucial dimension of the *analytic experience* itself. It is in the context of this experience that the two hermeneutic attitudes of suspicion and trust become intertwined through the respective figures of *technique* and *practice*.² The “school of suspicion,” represented primarily by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, is characterised by its attempt to explain the dynamic forces underlying presented “meanings” or truths.³ These explanatory frameworks are then utilised in a critical way in order to demonstrate the contingency and fallibility of thoughts, opinions, or beliefs that are typically taken to be transparent for the subject. Ricoeur’s readings of these positions aim to demonstrate that works of protest and deconstruction, guided by attitudes of suspicion, always presuppose corresponding works of reconstruction and re-figuration.

This chapter will explore some of the differences between the two types of knowledge or skills associated with techniques and practices. Psychoanalytic *technique*, I will argue, should be understood as a type of skill or art, one that is less concerned with hermeneutic questions of meaning than with quasi-scientific questions of *force*, feedback, struggle, and process. In contrast, the practice of psychoanalysis deals with the ways in which these forces or drives become significant for a particular subject, and within a singular context or history, “Broadly speaking, we may say that the investigatory procedure [psychoanalytic practice] tends to give preference to relations of *meaning* between mental productions, while the method of treatment [psychoanalytic technique] tends to give preference to relations of *force* between systems.”⁴ If we wish to pursue questions of hermeneutics after Ricoeur and Freud, these two types of practical skills, technique and practical understanding, should be taken as two incommensurable but interrelated moments of a general process of understanding.

Taking the relation between *technique* and understanding seriously is also relevant at a broader level. What the Freudian project does, at least in terms of its reflection on its own practice, is thematise the person as a technical being, that is, as a being who in the process of trying to understand also employs certain techniques, ways, or modes of action which can be explained

² Material from this chapter initially appeared in: Eoin Carney, “Technique and Understanding: Paul Ricoeur on Freud and the Analytic Experience”, *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016): 87-102.

³ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans., Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 32-36.

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “The Question of Proof in Freud’s Psychoanalytic Writings”, in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 23.

and even, to an extent, codified. Recognising this aspect of anthropological existence means that any hermeneutic account of human understanding requires detours through an analysis of the various structures or paradigms of action. This does not mean that we need to take the term *technique*, and its associations with *techne*, in a narrow sense. *Techniques*, when understood as being dependant on wider practices or horizons of application, should themselves be understood as incomplete. In Iser's sense of the term they are recursive, that is, they are structured like coherent systems, but gain traction through feedback procedures that constantly alter and reshape these structures. This view of technique is also present in Freud's understanding of the term, since for Freud it is strongly linked to the notion of *work* and to a type of work which is a clearing away of resistances so that paths to memory and narrative (to meaning), can be carved out.

The main claims pursued throughout the chapter will be: (1) Psychoanalytic techniques do not arise in relation to hermeneutic questions of *meaning*. That is, they are not aimed at making a meaning explicit, rather, they are concerned with the more 'technical' questions concerning desire and its mechanisms. However, (2) neither are they *instrumental*. They should not be linked to coercive methods of adaptation nor with the "observational" attitude which Ricoeur associates with behavioural psychology. Instead, (3) they should be understood as critical-hermeneutic; they are a type of *register* which enables the emergence of meaning through processes of application.⁵ Finally, (4) a question remains as to the extent to which the two fields of practice and technique can ever be reconciled. This question is posed by Freud himself in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", in which he reflects on the aim of therapy, finding a cure, and whether this aim can ever be achieved.⁶ For Freud, the question remains open at the theoretical level, but in practical experience some form of closure *can* be achieved. However, this is always a *poetic* closure – a practical response to a theoretical *aporia*. In this sense, any reconciliation or cure is always a fragile one, grounded in the judgement of the participating subjects, rather than on the theoretical or technical foundations of the practice.

Technique is strongly distinguished from psychoanalytic 'theory' which, for Ricoeur, often remains blind to insights arising from practical application. In this regard, Ricoeur is in agreement with Jean Laplanche in taking Freud's reflections on the analytic situation to

⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXIII (1937-1939)* (The Hogarth Press: London, 1964), 216-253.

represent an “anti-hermeneutics”.⁷ Psychoanalytic practice, as opposed to its theory, is an anti-hermeneutics to the extent that it resists the idea that there could be a metapsychological “code” or “key” (e.g., the oedipal complex) that would serve as an interpretive framework for directly translating the analysand’s discourse. For Laplanche, psychoanalytic ‘theories’, which are often constructed or built independently of reflections on the analytic experience, misunderstand the fundamentally deconstructive, “unbinding” process of the analysis itself, which proceeds via isolated, regional associations and dissociations rather than via overarching explanatory frameworks or “codes”. In fact, “the application of a new code to an old one, subjecting the manifest to “rereading”, can only amount to the redoubling of repression.”⁸ As mentioned above, I will argue that Ricoeur is also critical of *this* understanding of hermeneutics, whereby interpretation is synonymous with explication. Yet, Ricoeur has a much broader hermeneutic philosophy, which includes the crucial practical moment of appropriation, and it is in the sense of appropriation or practical application that psychoanalysis remains hermeneutic.

Considering the practical-hermeneutic questions of psychoanalysis means considering the interrelationship of psychoanalytic *techniques* and their *applications*. Hermeneutics, following Ricoeur, encompasses both these features of the analytic experience, not just the relationship between interpretation and explication. Psychoanalytic practice, which is intersubjective and situated, is fundamentally open and indeterminate, but if it can be said to have a defining aim or identifying reference point it is in its combination of a philosophical conception of the nature of consciousness and a clinical claim about human “health” or flourishing in relation to desire. A psychoanalytic practitioner (an analyst), while armed with useful techniques, is always confronted anew by this situation and a diversity of cases. Techniques must be rewritten or retooled if they are to remain effective. Psychoanalysis, as conceived by Ricoeur, should not be understood as the *direct application* of a set of methods or techniques to particular situations,

⁷ Jean Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics”, *Radical Philosophy* 79 (1996). Although Laplanche opposes his view to Ricoeur’s on the basis that Ricoeur “takes no account of the methods of Freud himself,” this may be due to the fact that he focuses on *Freud and Philosophy*, rather than on many of Ricoeur’s subsequent writings on psychoanalysis which deal directly with the analytic experience and methods of treatment. In agreement with Laplanche, Ricoeur is critical of psychoanalytic theories which are often misunderstood as arising “organically” from the analytic experience: “It is the misunderstanding of the circular connection between the procedure of investigation, method of treatment, and theoretical system that has led to overestimation of the theoretical system and, at the same time, to not noting possible discordances between what psychoanalysis *does* and what it *says* it does.” Paul Ricoeur, “Image and Language in Psychoanalysis”, in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 95.

⁸ Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics”, 11.

but is conceived of as a two-way relation between the types of hermeneutic consciousness associated with practice and the set of techniques associated with this process. I argue that this interrelationship between techniques and their applications constitutes psychoanalysis as a strong example of a hermeneutic practice, and can inform our conceptions of the practical features of technologies.

3.1 TECHNIQUE AND INTERPRETATION

Freudian psychoanalysis is a mixed discourse that aims to take into account human consciousness/mental activity, largely concerned with questions of meaning, and the human *unconscious*, which behaves *as a thing*.⁹ As Habermas points out, this distinguishes psychoanalysis from “traditional” hermeneutics and explains its emancipatory character.¹⁰ It differs from traditional hermeneutic or philological questions of interpretation as they are seen as remaining at the level of the “mental” life of a subject, whereas psychoanalysis, through incorporating questions of force and the unconscious into its theory becomes a *depth hermeneutics*; it aims to interpret not only the mental and public utterances of a speaker or author but also the private, censored, unconscious life of a subject, because these private, “split-off” symbols have an affective or distorting role in relation to public forms of discourse. It counts as an emancipatory project due to the therapeutic clearing away of “split-off” symbols, removing distortions from communication and allowing subjects to engage with one another at a more transparent level.

While largely in agreement with Habermas and Alfred Lorenzer,¹¹ Ricoeur’s approach to psychoanalysis differs in a key way. He reflects on psychoanalysis from *within* the Freudian framework, where the forces or drives associated with the unconscious and desire are not something which can ever be fully “normalised” or translated into cultural or rational expression, but rather must accompany the “working-through” of the patient indefinitely. If there is an emancipatory character to the Freudian dictum “Where the id was, there ego shall

⁹ For example, in the case of dreams: “Two separate functions may be distinguished in mental activity during the construction of a dream: the production of dream thoughts, and their transformation into the content of the dream.” This activity “is completely different (from waking thought) qualitatively and for that reason not immediately comparable to it. *It does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a new form*”, Sigmund Freud, *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 5, 506-507; quoted in Ricoeur, “The Question of Proof”, fn. 24; Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 214-245.

¹¹ Ricoeur, “The Question of Proof”, 30-33.

be,” it is not, as in Habermas’ case, the cultural or communicative project of overcoming instinct, but rather in overcoming the prejudice that views the rational and irrational elements of discourse as separable. This approach is similar to Simondon’s (Chapter 7) and, indeed, Ricoeur does reference Simondon in characterizing the ‘technical’ features of the human (found in the unconscious). As with Simondon’s approach to technology, the task is not to either disavow or fear the thing-like character of the unconscious, but to become more aware of its effect and to learn to work *with* it.

If the person is alienated from their own hidden motives, the psychoanalytic task is not necessarily one of enlightenment, whereby the hidden causes of action would become explicated through interpretation, but rather is one of appropriation. Characterizing the work as *appropriation* as opposed to *explication*, implies that what is being revealed or appropriated, with the aid of techniques, is something which is already present or intelligible, albeit in a repressed form. In this way, the *technique* of psychoanalysis is not something external to the practice, but deals with already-present but concealed features of the practice itself. The technique and practical elements are complementary in this sense, techniques aid in the process of drawing out what has already been implicitly understood, and therefore work to advance practical understanding.

Appropriation is brought about by way of a struggle to remove the bar between the conscious and the unconscious, and in a sense, challenge the misunderstanding that there is a radical separation between (rational, motivated) “person” and (irrational, casual) “thing”. The person must first recognise their own technicity in order to begin the work of “handling” it well. The notion of ‘technicity’ should be taken in a metaphorical sense, as a way of disclosing the thing-like character of the unconscious, i.e., the unconscious, according to Freudian thought, behaves in a way similar to Simondon’s “technical object” – it follows an internal or systematic logic as opposed the types of logic/motivations we would generally associate with classical concepts of agency. Ricoeur draws directly on the work of Simondon to highlight this point:

We can now complete our description of psychoanalysis as technique. Its technical object (to use Simondon’s term as a designation of the respondent or opponent of the psychoanalytic manoeuvre) is man insofar as he himself is a process of deformation, trans-position and dis-tortion applied to all the presentations (whether affective or ideational) of his oldest wishes, those which *The Interpretation of Dreams* calls “indestructible” or “atemporal” and which the article on “The Unconscious” declares to be *zeitlos* or timeless. Psychoanalysis is constituted as technique because, in the process of *Entstellung*, man himself behaves as a mechanism, submits to an external

law, and “condenses” or “displaces” his thoughts. . . . In this way the psyche is itself a technique practiced on itself, a technique of disguise and misunderstanding.¹²

Freud’s own papers on technique trace a developmental movement, guided by concrete experiences with patients, from an understanding of technique as interpretation and explication, towards an understanding of technique as a type of system or register. Technique, understood in this way, aims only *indirectly* at questions of meaning and interpretation. These papers on technique are notable for their departure from speculations regarding theoretical hypotheses in favour of a turn to practical questions regarding issues such as structures of appointments, “I adhere strictly to the principle of leasing a definite hour. Each patient is allotted a particular hour of my available working day; it belongs to him and he is liable for it, even if he does not make use of it.... No other way is practicable.”¹³ The concern here is with how psychoanalytic therapy can become more effective, not with general questions of human psychology. For Ricoeur, the “genre” of these papers is an important aspect of their practical relevance, “I consider these texts to be of an exemplary clarity. They suffice to open an abyss between everything that reflection can draw out of itself and that which only a craft can teach.”¹⁴

In one of these “exemplary” essays, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through”, Freud charts three “phases” of psychoanalytic technique, whose progression goes from a model close to that of behavioural/observational psychology, towards the dialogical model of exchange that Ricoeur associates with a hermeneutic understanding of technique. The first phase is that of Breuer’s cathartic method, which uses hypnosis to encourage the remembering of past, repressed events. This method of remembering is rejected by Freud on the basis that its focus on the isolated event of trauma does not take into account the crucial aspect of “repeating” associated with the formation of symptoms. Furthermore, the method of hypnosis displaces the work aspect of analysis onto the hypnotic technique itself. This ‘external’ foray into the patients unconscious is closer to a technological (taken in Ricoeur’s negative sense of the term) mode of manipulation, than a genuine psychoanalytic encounter.

The second phase involved a “deciphering” of the patient’s free associations on the part of the analyst, who would then communicate the interpretations to the analysand. Once again, this

¹² Paul Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique in Interpretation,” trans. Willis Domingo, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 184-185.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment”, in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*, trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1958), 126-127.

¹⁴ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 183.

method did not utilise the working-through aspect which the analysand themselves must go through in order to become conscious. Instead, the analyst performed the bulk of the work of interpretation. More importantly, if an “interpretation” or even a “guess” regarding the patient’s symptom is presented to them before the transference process has begun, it will be as if an external observer has communicated to them their inner-workings and fantasies, and will seem like a violation which provokes aggression and resistance, “[Premature diagnosis] will completely discredit oneself and the treatment in the patient’s eyes and will arouse the most violent opposition in him, whether one’s guess has been true or not; indeed, the truer the guess the more violent will be the resistance.”¹⁵ Whereas “in the earliest days of analytic technique we took an intellectualist view of the situation,”¹⁶ increased knowledge of the “mechanisms” of the unconscious and of the topographical differentiation of mental processes lead to the psychoanalytic insight that a “conscious” recognition did not necessarily imply an unconscious transformation, especially if that area of the mind had been strongly encrypted: “The strange behaviour of patients, in being able to combine a conscious knowing with not knowing, remains inexplicable by what is called normal psychology.”¹⁷ In other words, Freud arrives at a hermeneutic insight regarding the limitations of theory, taken in isolation. In response to this aporia, a technique must be developed which takes into account the dynamic and productive nature of practical working-through. This practical working-through abandons theoretical goals in favour of cultivating a relationship between both the patient and analyst (transference) and between the patient and his or her unconscious. Any external ‘interpretations’ or suggestions on the part of the analyst must become secondary to their own task of recognising the occurrence of transference, “When are we to begin making our communications to the patient? . . . Not until an effective transference has been established in the patient, a proper *rapprochement* with him.”¹⁸

The idea of ‘technique’, then, had multiple senses throughout the early history of psychoanalysis. It was firstly associated with mechanisms or operations that could be performed to manipulate the analysand (hypnosis). Following this it was seen as the clinical manifestation of psychoanalytic or psychological theories, as a ‘key’ or ‘cipher’ that could be applied to unlock the secrets of the analysand’s discourse. Finally, it was dissociated from both ‘method’ (in the sense of a repeatable procedure) and theory, and was seen as an

¹⁵ Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment”, 140

¹⁶ Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment”, 141

¹⁷ Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment”, 142

¹⁸ Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment”, 139

accompaniment to the dialogical setting of the analytical experience. This, final, concept of technique is founded on the idea that the unconscious works in and through *language*. More precisely, in and through *intersubjective* language (language mediated by desire). Since what is being ‘worked-through’ is already present in the discourse of the analysand, albeit in a concealed form, the ‘technique’ does not need to supply or supplement the analytic experience with anything, it simply has to work on making what is already implicit, explicit. Freud defines this sense of technique as a *struggle against resistances*. This final phase of technique, which Freud himself advocates, redistributes the types of labour associated with psychoanalytic practice and recognises the role of repetition in both the formation and overcoming of symptoms. The work becomes a *shared* work, and energies which would have been previously directed at processes of free-association or recounting, are now directed also at the processes of repeating and working-through. The analyst no longer does the work of remembering *on behalf* of the patient (either through inducing/guiding hypnosis, or by suggesting interpretations to the analysand), but instead aims to *clear away* the patient’s resistances so that they can perform the work of remembering themselves,

Finally, there was evolved the consistent technique used today, in which the analyst gives up the attempt to bring a particular moment or problem into focus. He contents himself with studying whatever is present for the time being on the surface of the patient’s mind, and employs the art of interpretation mainly for the purpose of recognising the resistances which appear there, and making them conscious to the patient. From this there results a new sort of division of labour: the doctor uncovers the resistances which are unknown to the patient; when these have been got the better of, the patient often relates the forgotten situations and connections without any difficulty.¹⁹

In hermeneutic terms, the analyst is no longer concerned with “reconstructing” a past event using interpretive methods, but rather focuses on the contemporaneity of the patients discourse as it presents itself in this new, analytical experience. They, in a sense, cease to be directly interested in the patient themselves, that is in terms of their “psychological” life, and rather become interested in the ways that this psychological life is presented through language in a dialogical situation.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*, trans., James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1958), 147.

3.2 TECHNIQUE AND NONTECHNIQUE

Although psychoanalytic methods of treatment are different than those associated with hermeneutic “explication”, they cannot be separated from the procedure of investigation itself. The procedures of psychoanalysis remain hermeneutic for Ricoeur, since the psychoanalytic situation is intersubjective. The dialectic between the quasi-mechanistic technique and its practical application in a dialogical situation leads to another important distinction for Ricoeur. Psychoanalytic technique is not an instrument for ‘adapting’ the analysand or for producing a ‘normalised’ self. It operates on linguistic structures, retaining both its hermeneutic and technical character. This relation with practical, hermeneutic questions of truth and meaning renders it “non-technological”: “In this sense, psychoanalysis is more an anti-technique. . . . When I say that psychoanalysis is not a technique of domination, I wish to emphasize its important feature of being a technique of veracity.”²⁰ In other words, Ricoeur distinguishes the two senses of technique according to the classic Heideggerian distinction between truth as correspondence and truth as unconcealment – psychoanalytic technique, in being related to the uncovering of already-present practical meanings, more closely follows a process of unconcealment. Ricoeur’s use of the term “non-technique” is instructive in this sense. Psychoanalytic technique both is and is not related to the question of modern technology. It is also important to note that what Ricoeur is calling “non-technique” – a technique grounded in practice instead of being circumscribed by theory – I am calling “hermeneutic technique”. This will become the focal point for claiming that the practice-based features of hermeneutic technique are shared by aspects of modern technology.²¹

Freud’s own reflections on technique are also expressions of a ‘non-technique’, in that the analyst moves from being a figure who administers a cure (through hypnosis, for example), to the figure of the ‘expert’ (who explicates and explains your symptoms on your behalf), to the figure of a dialogue partner who simply listens, points out resistances, and encourages the patient to work-through the past according to their own terms. With the receding of the centrality of a technique or method, the corresponding emergence of practical understanding is seen. The singularity of the patient can only appear in the absence of a more dominating technique. Although Ricoeur provocatively labels this approach a ‘non-technique’, it still

²⁰ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 185. (Section 4 – Technological Applications)

²¹ Explored in more detail in *Section 4 – Technological Applications*.

retains many technical features (discussed above), but these features are placed in a dialectical relation with practical understanding, rendering them more ‘truthful’.

The art of interpretation is indeed replaced with the task of “handling” the patient. However, if, with Ricoeur, we aim to recognise the phenomenon of *distanciation* in any realisation of language as discourse, then a productive understanding of *technique* can be adopted without it having to constitute a violation of the patient’s singularity. For example, a patient’s dreams, which are always intimate and personal, are admitted into the analytic situation *via* the process of recounting. That is, what is subjected to the technique of the analyst is the dream content *as it is told* by the analysand, or in other words the dream-content realised as discourse. The analyst is not interested in naturalistic questions concerning the actual dream itself, but rather with the way in which the patient recounts it to her. This conversational setting for examining an intimate aspect of the patient’s life could be contrasted with an analysis of a dream in a neurological study. Again, through replacing the ‘art’ of interpretation with the work of handling resistances, Freud is ascribing psychoanalytic technique the role not of understanding the patient better (as a singular individual), but of understanding their particular form of *discourse* better. To draw on Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the text, the analyst as technician is no longer directly concerned with the psychic life “behind” the patient’s words, but rather becomes concerned with the types of worlds and meanings opened up *in front of* the patient’s text.

Psychoanalytic technique does depend on, and gain its specificity from, a series of “technological” metaphors, which perhaps at first sight lead it to be confused with a method of controlling or mastering natural drives: “It is a technique, by its character as work and its commerce with energies and mechanisms which are attached to the economy of desire.”²² But it nevertheless is more concerned with the “derivatives” of instinctual representatives, “The analyst never handles forces directly but always indirectly in the play of meaning, double meaning, and substituted, displaced, or transposed meanings. An economy of desire, yes – but across a semantics of desire. A dynamics, yes – but across a hermeneutics.”²³ In this way, psychoanalytic technique is related to the act of *distanciation*. By acting on linguistic manifestations of desire (as opposed to addressing the desire *directly*), it is reflective of the distance already produced between a person’s understandings (unconscious or ‘pre-understandings’) and their representations of these understandings to themselves or another.

²² Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 187.

²³ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 187.

It becomes a “technique of veracity” through this interrelationship between a hermeneutics of discourse and a technique of “handling” resistances. The goal of the handling is “access to true discourse,”²⁴ and not necessarily finding a “cure” for the analysand. Although psychoanalytic treatment does aim to move progressively from the pleasure principle towards the reality principle, the “reality” in question here has to be distinguished from “homologous concepts such as stimuli or environment.”²⁵ Instead, “this reality is fundamentally the truth of a personal history in a concrete situation; it is not, as in psychology, the order of stimuli as they are known by the experimenter but rather the true meaning which the patient must arrive at through the obscure labyrinth of the fantasy.”²⁶

This aspect of Freudian psychoanalysis is attested to most strongly through the way in which it conceives of the work of mourning. This work does not consist in a complete “destruction” or annulling of the fantasy object which gives rise to melancholia, but rather in demonstrating the complicity of a fantasy object with the real-life resistances that it gives rise to. Once these resistances have been removed, the fantasy is not dispelled but *unmasked*. It can then be resituated at the appropriate level, that of the imaginary, and can accompany the patient in their working through without giving rise to further resistance,

Far from restricting itself to vanquishing the fantasy to the benefit of reality, the cure also recovers it as a fantasy to situate it, without confusing it with what is real, on the level of the imaginary. . . . I will venture to say, in summation, that what is psychoanalytically relevant is what a subject makes of his fantasies.²⁷

Furthermore, Ricoeur situates the Freudian approach within a philosophical tradition concerned not with mastering or dispelling desire, but with redirecting and working with human desire in the project of becoming a subject. For Ricoeur, the analytic experience aims to recover two aspects of human existence, the *ability to speak* and the *ability to love*,²⁸ aspects of the self that have become detached and dispersed among various idols, pasts, or dogmatic forms of discourse. This “exteriorisation” of desire is what has to be worked-through, via detours, so that the subject can find themselves again: “The thesis of the anteriority, the archaism, of desire is fundamental to a reformulation of the *cogito*: like Aristotle, like Spinoza

²⁴ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 188.

²⁵ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 188.

²⁶ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 188.

²⁷ Ricoeur, “The Question of Proof”, 19-20.

²⁸ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 192-194.

and Leibniz, like Hegel, Freud places desire at the centre of the act of existing.”²⁹ The project is not one of ‘freeing’ the will, which would be associated with a technological project of mastering nature, but rather, following Spinoza, “psychoanalysis proceeds...by suspending consciousness and thus rendering the subject equal to its real slavery. It is precisely by beginning with the level of this slavery, by delivering oneself without restraint to the imperious flux of deep motivations, that the true situation of consciousness is discovered.”³⁰ If we associate technological rationality with the will to power, as Heidegger does, then the psychoanalytic method must be understood as a “nontechnique”, as resisting this approach to human nature.

3.3 THE PLAYGROUND OF TRANSFERENCE

It should be clear at this point that Ricoeur’s understanding of technique is complex. Along with Freud he sees it as being something distinct from an “interpretive” method of explication, and indeed as arising due to the need to resist a too-quick interpretation of symptoms, but also as being separate from “technology”, taken in the sense of being a controlling attitude indifferent to human or culturally specific questions of meaning. In order to explore the function of technique more fully it is necessary to shift focus away from psychoanalytic discourse and towards the hermeneutic sphere of practice, where technique becomes meaningful in relation to human action and understanding. Psychoanalytic technique is not an ‘instrument’, but rather as a type of *register* which guides the recursive unfolding of experience throughout the course of analysis. The recursivity takes place between concrete subjects, with corresponding (partly concealed) life histories, and the framework represented by the *technique*, whose purpose is to gradually clear away built up resistances so that new meanings and practical orientations can emerge.

One of the guiding motives here will be that, following Ricoeur, critical theory and hermeneutics must be taken as inseparable. A technique of unmasking, led by a critical attitude of suspicion, can never become meaningful or effective until it is situated in a relation which is fundamentally one of *belonging*, “for when all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology”, trans., Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 243.

³⁰ Ricoeur, “Technique and Nontechnique”, 191-192.

anyone *in absentia* or *in effigie*.”³¹ Practical understanding cannot occur independently of application, and a situation in which an interpretation is applied is always one to which a subject always already belongs. Of course, analytic experience presupposes the persistence of (historical) distance due to the nature of repression. It is an *archaeology* of desire as much of its work involves forays into past, distant events, such as those of childhood. But this archaeology is always accompanied by a corresponding *teleology* which aims to resituate these past experiences in the present contexts to which the subject belongs and participates in. The patient’s life history is the context for the application; they have not understood an interpretation of their symptom fully if it has not begun to affect their life. This is why the analytic experience has as one of its central forms of “work” the task of forming an appropriate narrative.

Application here must be taken in the traditional, but ‘forgotten’, sense that Gadamer outlines in *Truth and Method*. Rather than being a separate, secondary moment, whereby knowledge or an interpretation is first gained and subsequently applied or “tested”, it should be seen as an integral moment in a process of understanding. The same is true of Ricoeur’s concept of appropriation; a text will remain misunderstood until the horizons of the world of the text and the horizons of the world of the reader have been brought into dialogue. This aspect of understanding is also what renders interpretation perpetually incomplete. There will always be the possibility that a text will be understood in a new way through future processes of application or appropriation. As already discussed in Chapter 1, Gadamer points out that application was, for a time, a central concern for hermeneutics “it was considered obvious that the task of hermeneutics was to adapt the text’s meaning to the concrete situation to which the text is speaking.”³² This was clear both in cases of legal and biblical hermeneutics: “A law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect.”³³

In relation to psychoanalysis, we could say the same about the ‘genre’ of the life or case history of a patient. It is an unsettled text, a narrative that has beneath it the force of traumatic or repressed past events which have a ripple effect on the surface, literal narrative. Through the

³¹ Sigmund Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference”, in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*, trans., James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1958), 108.

³² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 1975), 307.

³³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 307.

lens of psychoanalytic technique this narrative, at first appearing as nonsensical and disconnected, becomes re-read as being subjected to these forces, with the result that seemingly disparate moments become signs of a repetition of the same event. Through the work of reflection, they cease to become ‘literal’ and instead become ‘symbolic’. However, this re-telling process can only take place at the level of analytic experience itself, and therefore takes on a fundamentally *applied* character. It is not an instantaneous moment of revelation, but rather a constant and enduring working-through of resistances. The patient’s text is not something which has to be ‘mined’ for meaning, it is not a series of symptoms which merely have to be reconnected to an original event in order to be overcome, rather the analysis takes place in an *intersubjective* or dialogical setting and it is this context which sets the scene for the working-through. In this way, Freud’s metaphor of translation should be compared with Gadamer’s understanding of the translators task, “the interpreter’s task is not simply to repeat what one of the partners says in the discussion he is translating, but to express what is said in a way that seems most appropriate to him.”³⁴ The analyst struggles to translate the analysand’s utterances into the appropriate register of the technique, but the analysand must also struggle to find a way to render the technique *meaningful* in relation to their own life, a life which contains a much larger set of involvements and experiences than can be incorporated into the psychoanalytic situation and its techniques. Divorced from its dependency on practical application, technique can become a dangerous tool for moulding the patient as an “object”, for example in the case of Dora (Ida Bauer),

As several of Freud’s successors noted, the “talking cure” did not actually work for Dora for the probable reason that Freud construed her story according to his own unconscious identifications – in particular with the virile Herr K., whom Freud believed Dora wished to marry.... The problem with Dora’s case may well be that it was treated by Freud less as a life in search of a history than as a (case) history in search of a life.³⁵

This radical distancing on the part of the therapist, the refusal to recognise the claims of the patient *as* another, and not just as a “case” to submit to a technique, can be as therapeutically negligent as a situation in which a technique aiming at a cure is abandoned altogether.

Freud’s outline of *transference* serves as a unique and productive contribution to a critical-practical understanding. Characterising psychoanalytic technique as a struggle against resistances means putting transference at the heart of psychoanalysis, since, “finally every

³⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 307.

³⁵ Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 35-40.

conflict has to be fought out in the sphere of transference.”³⁶ Transference is significant for the wider consideration of the relation between technique and practice because it productively combines aspects of technique (struggle against resistances, “handling” of the patient) and practical understanding. In terms of practical understanding, it plays on key aspects of dialogue, understood in a hermeneutic sense. As was mentioned above, Freud’s own term for the type of relationship established through transference is one of *rapprochement* between two partners. Furthermore, it draws implicitly on hermeneutic conceptions of *play* and *history*. The theoretical claim underpinning transference is that a subject, shaped by childhood experiences, carries with them a type of template, which contributes (often negatively) to the formation of relations with others. The mixture of innate characteristics and early formative experiences “produces what might be described as a stereotype plate (or several such), which is constantly repeated – constantly reprinted afresh – in the course of the person’s life.”³⁷ The analyst becomes inserted into this series via transference,

Thus it is a perfectly normal and intelligible thing that the libidinal cathexis of someone who is partly unsatisfied, a cathexis which is held ready in anticipation, should be directed as well to the figure of the doctor...the cathexis will introduce the doctor into one of the psychical “series” which the patient has already formed.³⁸

The technique of transference, which is developed around this insight, consists not in a critical “removal” of stereotypical models, but rather in a *bringing into play* of these models in the context of a situation that is guided by a technique of unmasking.

This bringing into play of the fore-structures of the patient, so that they can be transformed through application, is what renders analytic experience a *hermeneutics* of suspicion, i.e., the investigation into the psychic life of the patient is not carried out by a distant observer but by a distanced participant. The analytic experience involves a “staging” of a repetitive series, a “transposing [of] the drama that generated the neurotic situation onto a sort of miniature artificial stage,”³⁹ This characterization of transference draws on similar features of *play* and *appropriation* that Ricoeur adopts from Gadamer.⁴⁰ By putting a subject matter in *play*, you are at once distancing yourself from your everyday self/concerns, whilst allowing a *deeper* or

³⁶ Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference”, 104

³⁷ Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference”, 99-100.

³⁸ Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference”, 100.

³⁹ Ricoeur, “The Question of Proof”, 16.

⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur, “Appropriation”, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 1981). 182-197.

concealed truth to be brought into focus. For Gadamer, it is only in *play* that these concealed *truths* can appear, since, in contrast to regimented, ordered, everyday existence, ontological truths are dynamic and ‘playful’.⁴¹ This means that transference is not just projection; it is also an *exposure* to the other within oneself. In a similar way to engaging with a text, putting one’s own assumptions or life history in play is what is required for transformation to occur, “To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds that interpretation unfolds.... The metamorphosis of the world in play is also the playful metamorphosis of the ego.”⁴² This hermeneutic approach, of exposing oneself to the text as opposed to examining it from a distance, captures the dialectic of distancing and belonging, since even at a reflective distance one is exposed to the consequences of the reading. The same dialectic is at work in psychoanalysis, where past patterns are brought into play in a distanced or reflective mode (the analytic situation), but in such a way as to re-appropriate these patterns by transforming them through novel insights. The *play* or *staging* of transference is a feature of psychoanalytic *technique* at work in practice, i.e., technique, regarded as a method of reflective distancing as opposed to domination is seen as something that enables a productive self-distancing in the project of revealing significant truths. Technique and practical understanding are complementary in this sense.

However, if the technique complements practical understanding in certain regards (as a mode of productive distancing), there remains a fundamental *difference* between practical understanding (of meanings, interpretations, etc.) and the discourse of the technique (which is concerned with “economies of desire”). This difference itself is also key to how the technique-practice dialectic is rendered productive. Psychoanalytic techniques, in this sense, can be characterised as a type of *register*, whose technological metaphors aim at bringing to light aspects of the analysand’s motivations and desires that remain hidden to them. Every case of psychoanalysis begins with or is founded on a recognition of suffering and a corresponding motivation to alleviate or better understand this suffering. Taken on their own, these motivations or resources found in the suffering person are not sufficient to overcome the psychic conflict. The right paths to follow on the way to the ‘cure’ are opaque. The technique of psychoanalysis aims to gradually bring to light which paths will work through the clearing away of resistances, and a corresponding “handling” or redirecting of libidinal energies toward

⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102-125.

⁴² Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology”, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 292.

these paths (or a “storing up” of libidinal energy for this purpose through various techniques, e.g., abstinence), “Two things are lacking in the [motive force to annul suffering]: it does not know what paths to follow to reach this end and it does not possess the necessary quota of energy with which to oppose the resistances. The analytic treatment helps to remedy both of these deficiencies.”⁴³

Arguably, the type of work involved in this clearing away of resistances is one that is fundamentally *recursive*. The analytic experience takes place over a long period of time, and involves many alterations to the techniques being employed as the subject matter of the analysand shifts and more layers of their history and condition unfold. For Wolfgang Iser, Ricoeur’s reading of Freud succeeds in drawing out the specificity of psychoanalytic theory as being fundamentally concerned with *hidden* or obscured subject matters and which has therefore developed a corresponding mode of interpretation which is that of a *transactional loop*,

The looping operation is designed to regain what is lost; by making the repressed return, it clears blockages, thus recovering what the subject had been striving for when losing itself to the otherness of life. What is glimpsed of the hidden *archê* is to be fed forward into a surmised *telos*, from which a feedback will be received.⁴⁴

This necessary “feedback” process, characteristic of a recursive procedure, is caused by the nesting of the method of treatment (technique) into the investigatory procedure of analysis. The investigatory procedure, the field of meaning and discourse, and the methods of treatment, which are concerned with questions of force and the struggle against resistances, are two fundamentally incommensurable modes of practical understanding. This is what gives rise to “feedback” and the characterisation of the experience as recursive. Arguably, Ricoeur’s readings of Freud work to thematise this incommensurability by demonstrating the ways that a hermeneutics of suspicion presupposes a phenomenological understanding of meaning and consciousness. Ricoeur’s grafting of both the Hegelian and Husserlian understandings of intersubjectivity and the process of becoming conscious onto Freud’s archaeology of desire aims to destabilise “dogmatic” interpretations of Freud and show instead the fundamentally *regional* aspects of Freudian methods of interpretation. The psychoanalytic experience itself depends on the incommensurability between techniques and practical investigation since the *working-through* aspect of understanding proposed by Freud is something that explicitly resists

⁴³ Freud, “On beginning the treatment”, 143

⁴⁴ Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 80.

‘instant’ or immediate events of comprehension in favour of the gradual, and potentially interminable, process of clarification. The tension between the technique and practice opens what Iser refers to as a “liminal” space in which conflicts are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. The technique conditions the quality or nature of this liminal space, whilst also providing a means of access or “pathway” to hidden motivations

The register brought to bear in such an [interpretive] act is marked by a basic duality: (a) it is meant to provide a means of access to what is interpreted, but (b) it is also the framework into which the subject matter is translated. These two functions of the register are interdependent, and this holds true – at least up to a point – even if the register is more or less superimposed on the subject matter. In this case, the framework nevertheless functions as a means of access.⁴⁵

This point also marks the limits of psychoanalytic technique. The regional, practical “subject matter” to which the technique is employed is one that extends beyond the analytic experience. It incorporates the life histories of both the analyst and analysand. As Vinicio Busacchi notes, the particular framework of the method of treatment proposed by Freud was seen, to an extent, as being surpassable by Ricoeur, through an alternative framework derived from narrative understanding:⁴⁶

It is no longer possible to preserve the economic, I would even say quasi-energetic model of Freudianism. It is necessary to reincorporate the linguistic element, the dialogical element, the element having to do with the relation between appearance and truth in the imaginary (an element one can call Platonic), and the narrative element, and to coordinate these four elements to make up the basis of a theory appropriate to the analytic experience, a hermeneutics.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, there is a crucial concept of *work* captured by the technological, energetic metaphors of technique. The hermeneutic reading of the psychoanalytic experience aims to draw out the value of this work in-itself, as opposed to seeing it simply as a means of production:

For its part, the work of mourning, since it requires time, projects the artisan of the work ahead of himself: he will have to continue, one by one, to cut the ties that hold him in

⁴⁵ Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 151.

⁴⁶ Vinicio Busacchi, “Postface: Desire, Identity, the Other – Psychoanalysis for Paul Ricoeur after *Freud and Philosophy*”, in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 224.

⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative: Its Place in Psychoanalysis”, in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 208.

the grip of the lost objects of his love and his hate; as for reconciliation with the loss itself, this will forever remain an unfinished task.⁴⁸

Recognising the *work* character of mourning means recognizing the figure of, what Ricoeur calls here, the “artisan”, i.e., of a figure who is to some extent equipped not only with self-knowledge but with knowledge of *how* things (in this case, the unconscious) work. In other words, when it comes to practical knowledge of oneself, immediate self-knowledge does not suffice. Due to the intersubjective nature of desire, some degree of distancing is required in the task of understanding oneself. Psychoanalytic technique, understood as a register or framework to aid in the clearing away of resistances, is still invaluable when considering the above “artisanal” task of “cutting the ties” between oneself and the fantasy objects which have been “unsuccessfully” mourned. However, beyond the figure of the “artisan” or the therapist, it is only immediate self-understanding (reflected in the experiences of vulnerability and capability) that can accompany the patient beyond the therapy room and which anticipates the fundamental negativity of experience and the impossibility of total reconciliation.

3.4 THE FRACTURED DIALECTIC

One final, key feature of the technique-practice relation in the analytic experience must be pointed out. This is the feature that is suggested by the difference between or incommensurability of the practice and the technique. Within Freud’s own writings, he puts into question the therapeutic status of psychoanalysis by investigating whether it is “terminable” or not.⁴⁹ In the context of the current investigation, this question relates to whether the practice-technique dialectic can be seen as commensurable or incommensurable, i.e., as to whether the struggle and working-through carried out by the analyst and analysand, with the aids of techniques, can be resolved and overcome in the figure of a ‘healthy’, or ‘cured’ patient.

As we have seen already, what gives technique its vitality is its subject matter - the (ego) life of the patient, which is both anticipated by, and exceeds, the limits of the technique. Freud even

⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 88.

⁴⁹ Freud, Sigmund, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 216-253.

acknowledges that, if a technique is a struggle against resistances, the ego is something that struggles against this very struggle.⁵⁰ Psychoanalytic technique is not applied to the ‘human mind’, as in the case of behavioural psychology, but to the life-history of a human. With behavioural psychology, the completeness of the method and its outcome is determined in advance, by focusing on abstracted, objective characteristics of behaviour, such as measurable response to stimuli, etc. The outcome of analysis, by contrast, is not known in advance, the facts dealt with are those submitted by the analysand themselves, and by the varying practical contexts over the course of treatment. The wager of psychoanalysis is that this, more practice-based, selection process is more ‘truthful’, in the sense that what emerges in analysis, by conscious or unconscious selection, will be what is more relevant or meaningful to this particular case or person. This is the type of dynamic we have explored above. Freud himself characterises the two types of procedures as id-analysis (explication of hidden motives using techniques and interpretation), and ego-analysis, which is a determining of the character and particularities of the current patient, i.e., an analysis of the features which emerge through the practice of psychoanalysis. The therapeutic effort is always a work of mediation between the clinical and personal, “During the treatment our therapeutic work is constantly swinging backwards and forwards like a pendulum between a piece of id-analysis and a piece of ego-analysis.”⁵¹

Whereas the id-analysis is directed at the ‘mechanical’ workings of the unconscious, the practical subject matter, the life-history of the analysand, must be grasped in its properly *historical* character, that is, in its processual and developing nature. Psychoanalytic technique, which is directed towards putting the past in play, to explicate and overcome it, finds within this aim its own incompleteness. By encouraging, or provoking, the work of remembering, understood as anamnesis, it constitutes its subject as a historical subject. Or, in other words, as an *unfinished* subject. As Gadamer writes, “To exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete [*Geschichtlichsein heisst, nie im Sichwissen aufgehen*]”⁵² Technique, as an aid to memory, brings with it all the ambiguities of Plato’s *pharmakon*.

Aside from these philosophical understandings of history and incompleteness, the reasons Freud himself examines for the difficulty of the ego in relation to its own ‘completeness’ are

⁵⁰ “Thus we can see that there *is* a resistance against the uncovering of resistances...They are resistances not only to the making conscious of the contents of the id, but also to the analysis as a whole, and thus recovery.” Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 239.

⁵¹ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 238.

⁵² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301.

numerous, and range from ‘innate’ factors and dispositions (depending on their libidinal type, patients may be as ‘granite’ or ‘soft clay’, with the first type being strongly resistant, and changes to the second type being impermanent), to external factors such as stress and aging (“psychic entropy”). Persistent throughout Freud’s essay is a tension between his reflections on psychoanalysis (and its technique) and his reflections on the unavoidable question of ‘human nature’, especially in its historical character. This is another instance of what Ricoeur maintains throughout his readings of Freud - that psychoanalytic reflection always leads towards philosophical speculation, that encounters with Freud lead us to encounters with Hegel. Freud’s own terminus of philosophical reflection is Empedocles whose fundamental principles of love and strife resonate with Freud’s own conflicting cosmic forces; Eros and ‘destructiveness’, which underpin the development of the ego, and guarantee its forever unsettled state. All these characterizations result in a crucial point; if there existed an ‘ideal ego’, an ego which would embrace therapy wholly, psychoanalytic technique would indeed find completion. Instead, all ego states are already “altered” states. They have their own patterns, peculiarities, investments, traumas, and so on. In this sense, technique does not operate in an ‘ideal’ setting, such as a laboratory, but takes place in the real world and through real structures and living processes. Any alterations effected during therapy are always *alterations of alterations*. Freud describes this point as follows:

We know that the first step towards attaining intellectual mastery of our environment is to discover generalizations, rules and laws which bring order into chaos. In doing this we simplify the world of phenomena; but we cannot avoid falsifying it, especially if we are dealing with processes of development and change. What we are concerned with is discerning a *qualitative* alteration, and as a rule in doing so we neglect, at any rate to begin with, a *quantitative* factor. In the real world, transitions and intermediate stages are far more common than sharply differentiated opposite states. In studying developments and changes we direct our attention solely to the outcome; we readily overlook the fact that such processes are usually more or less incomplete – that is to say, they are in fact only partial alterations.⁵³

Pushing this point even further, and coming close to Ricoeur’s own thoughts on the symbol and mythology, Freud suggests that ‘alterations’ to understandings, such as therapeutic insights and transformations, *conserve* prior alterations in their structure. Developments are not ‘successive’, “...replacements do not take place all of a sudden, but gradually, so that portions of the earlier organization always persist alongside of [sic] the more recent one ...What has

⁵³ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 228

once come to life clings tenaciously to its existence. One feels inclined to doubt sometimes whether the dragons of primeval days are really extinct.”⁵⁴ Owing to these factors, which render it extremely difficult to “quantitatively” assess analysis, the question of whether analysis is terminable or interminable is left open at the theoretical level. Furthermore, it implies that no technique or technology will ever be total, at least when it comes to questions of human understanding.

Nevertheless, even when questions remain open at the theoretical level, this does not exclude a resolution at the practical and technical levels, by bringing about a sense of *mastery* (as opposed to control). To introduce this question in the essay, Freud quotes Sándor Ferenczi: “analysis is not an endless process, but one which can be brought to a natural end with sufficient skill and patience on the analyst’s part.”⁵⁵ For Ferenczi, improvements in skill and discipline *can* yield positive results, a view which resonates with Foucault’s *technique de soi*. Freud, though, always the humanist (and pessimist), calls this recourse to technique a “comforting assurance”, and asserts, instead, “Analysts are people who have learned to practice a particular art; alongside this, they may be allowed to be human beings like anyone else.”⁵⁶ Being practiced by flawed human beings, analysis never *guarantees* a resolution, and can always elude mastery, yet it does *promise* resolution and mastery, a fact that cannot be disclosed through theory or technique, but only through *practical experience*, for example in the case of *agreement*,

I am not intending to assert that analysis is altogether an endless business. Whatever one’s theoretical attitude to the question may be, the termination of analysis is, I think a practical matter. Every experienced analyst will be able to recall a number of cases in which he has bidden a patient a permanent farewell *rebus bene gestis*.⁵⁷

Determining whether “things have gone well”, is a matter of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). On this point, Freud and Ricoeur are in accord with one another. One of the returning motifs in Ricoeur’s work is the notion of a ‘poetic resolution’ to a ‘theoretical aporia’. Despite the inscrutability of time, we create works which express temporal experience (narratives); despite the heterogeneity of meanings across languages, we translate; despite the impossibility of forgiveness, we forgive; despite the persistence of trauma, we heal. These examples all attest to the fact that an artful or poietic work does not belong to the theoretical structures that it

⁵⁴ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 229

⁵⁵ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 247.

⁵⁶ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 247.

⁵⁷ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 249-250.

responds to (otherwise it would be impossible). Instead, it emerges through the experience of working-through aporias at the practical level.

I have aimed to elucidate three key features of psychoanalytic technique that demonstrate the ways in which it should be moved from being taken in a *general* sense as a method or art of discerning hidden meanings in human consciousness, toward a greater appreciation of its fundamentally *regional* character. The evolution of psychoanalytic technique, guided by insights from this region of analytic experience and the concrete work of engaging with patients, shows that it becomes less and less an intellectual tool of explication, and more of a *techne* or skill of handling the “thing-like” character of discourse, that is, those aspects of language which behave in ways not bound to relations of “meaning”, but which still are *recognisable* as forces, displacements, distortions, and so on. The wager of psychoanalytic technique understood in this sense is that if one pays attention to the (technical) ways in which resistances form, and aims to address *this* aspect of the analytic experience, new narrative paths and orientations will *emerge* organically.

However, the task of working-through resistances is not one of moulding or adapting the patient’s identity, but rather a redirecting of desires and motivations in new directions. This means that the analysand’s concrete life history must be taken as the start and end-point for the technique. The technique does not ‘suggest’ or impose a model of health or flourishing for the analysand, but rather works with, and through, the pre-given material found in their life history and self-understanding. It does not aim to totally nullify or demythologize idols, but rather to situate them on a more appropriate plane of understanding, through which they become *unmasked* and seen as scattered aspects of the imaginary and therefore of oneself.

Psychoanalytic technique is inextricably linked to the practical tasks of application and understanding. It remains distinctive from practical concerns with meaning, but is fundamentally bound to the symbolic, lived experience of the psychoanalytic procedure of investigation. Techniques of transference consist in bringing into play aspects of the implicit understandings of the analysand so that these understandings can be made more explicit and worked through. This conception of technique is instructive for hermeneutics more generally, as it highlights the recursivity of experience, especially practical experiences which are mediated by various registers or frameworks. The persistent tension between the *techne* or craft of psychoanalysis, involving a handling of and struggle against resistances, and the field of meaning (the analysand’s life history) to which it is applied, gives rise to a form of hermeneutic understanding which is not one of interpretation as “explication”, but of interpretation as

involving a mixture of tasks of clarification alongside a “playing with” prehistories and hidden subject matters. The meanings which emerge through this process are different from the types of meaning which emerge from an “intellectual” or philological interpretation of a text.

Finally, we must ask if there is not an asymmetry between psychoanalytic technique and practical understanding. The practical understandings of a subject will always involve ‘concealed’ elements, and will always remain subject to change and transformation through encounters with a plurality of frameworks and registers. In this way, psychoanalytic technique can only go so far in the important works of mourning, remembering and becoming a subject. Outside of the analytic experience, these tasks must be continued indefinitely, “Melancholy is not simply a psychic disturbance. It is a threat inscribed in each of us, once we begin to consent to sadness, to fatigue, to discouragement. Its name then is despair, the “sickness unto death” described by Kierkegaard.”⁵⁸ The struggle for resolution undertaken by a person entering a course of therapy, aided by the analyst, is both terminable *and* interminable. Simple alterations to our self-understanding are often sufficient to determine that a course of therapy has finished, even if the over-arching (metapsychological) goal of technique is to effect a more fundamental cure. This, of course, leaves us vulnerable to regressions, new problems, new forms of repetition, and so on, but recognising this vulnerability is crucial to understanding the limits of any technique applied to historical subjects. If the human self is defined in relations to its practical, *historical* character, then all techniques that are aimed at altering or effecting human life are bound to fail or remain “incomplete”.

Extrapolating from these readings of psychoanalytic technique by Ricoeur, it is possible to suggest a hermeneutic account of technique as being both related-to and different-from immediate practical understanding. Ricoeur’s positive account of psychoanalytic technique allows us to consider the *productive* and *dynamic* roles that techniques play in uncovering practical meanings at a distance. Ricoeur’s view of technique, here, also suggests its *critical* function – it is also a “nontechnique”, a mode of distanced reflection on practical understanding that opposes itself to the more radical ‘distance’ of modern technology. In the next chapter, these features of hermeneutic technique will be explored in relation to narrative distanciation. Narratives works, like psychoanalytic techniques, can be considered along the lines of a

⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “The Difference between the Normal and the Pathological as a Source of Respect,” in *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 196.

‘technique’ that is also a ‘nontechnique’. In the context of “modern technology” and its approach to time, narratives offer a productive distancing of our experience of time.

4. NARRATED WORLDS

It has been argued so far that techniques and practical understanding are two related but irreconcilable moments of the dialectical unfolding of meaning in a given situation. Meaning cannot appear independently of the techniques which anticipate certain kinds of meanings or productions. However, due to the singularity and variability of practical application, the boundaries of a technique are constantly renegotiated. Linguistic structures are systematic (sign-based) reflections of symbolic, lived experience. Similarly, psychoanalytic technique involves a set of instruments for bringing lived, experiential aspects of unconscious forces and drives into the field of speech and language so that they can be analysed, reflected on, diagnosed, and so on. Linguistic ambiguity and unconscious drives are two aspects of 'life' (*bios*) which lie outside of our control, yet which we constantly aim to understand and clarify through interpretation (*logos*). This chapter will seek to explore a third key aspect of lived experience for Ricoeur; temporality, and its corresponding technique of clarification - narrative.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the productive tension that Ricoeur identifies between the *time of works* and the *time of action*. For Ricoeur, narratives are works. They stand against the world of action, possessing their own structural integrity and *world*. The work-character of narrative is brought about through the technique of *emplotment*, which, for Ricoeur, is an operation that remains distinct from the *mimetic* function of narrative. Mimesis renders narrative relevant for understanding action, but emplotment, as reflective of cosmological time, differentiates and transforms the imitation of action into a concordant whole that is autonomous. Although narratives are related to action through mimesis, they are distanced from action through the configurational thrust of emplotment. It is emplotment that grants narrative a world, and it is mimesis that helps bridge the distance between this world and our own. As with the use of psychoanalytic techniques in analytic experience, narrative emplotment provides an *indirect* disclosure of lived meaning and understanding. Both psychoanalytic techniques and emplotment depend on *systematic* approaches to the world, their work is a dynamic ordering of relations between things, causes and effects. Yet, through being related to practical understanding, these systematic approaches to the un-systematic, discordant *experience* of time are nevertheless seen as productive.

For Ricoeur, narrative is defined in relation to *time*, therefore the distancing it produces is due to a practical, human attempt to resolve the problems associated with time and temporal, lived experience. For example, the idea of a narrative self is crucial for Ricoeur to bridge the different, opposing senses of the self-identity that are disclosed by an objective analysis of action and identity (the *idem* self), on the one hand, and the ethical, practical analysis of the self as capable and suffering, on the other.⁵⁹ Narratives reflectively and poetically combine both these dimensions of the self using a form that synthesizes the activity of tracing events and causes (*emplotment*) with the articulation of agency and singularity (through developing characters, for example). In narratives, both these operations are intertwined - to develop a plot or sequence of actions is also to develop a character, and vice versa.⁶⁰ Against Aristotle, who places plot at the pinnacle of the narrative form (so that there could be a plot that is devoid of characters), Ricoeur insists on this mixed nature of narrative – as creatively combining both an understanding of the human experiences of capability/suffering, on the one hand, and the technical or objective task of arranging events, causes, effects, and so on, on the other.⁶¹ Beyond these compositional features of narrative, it is also seen as being grounded in the human experience of time due to the fact that the narrative, whilst possessing its own world and horizon, is also intended to be *read* or followed (*mimesis*₃). The act of reading is an attempt to fulfil the internal intentions of the narrative projection, rather than a supplemental action. In other words, the perspective of the reader or interactor is as integral to the narrative form as the world projected by the narrative itself.

A contrast to the narrative framework for disclosing the temporal features of human experience is found in Lorenzo C. Simpson's work on technology and time. For Simpson, technologies also translate practical concerns into a different register. However, whereas narrative modes of expression aim to unfold already-present *meanings* (associated with human understanding and comportment) found in practices and actions, technologies reduce a practice to its *value*, and then work to utilize or optimize this value. Technologies are devoid of the *character* or 'human' features of narrative mentioned above – they do not represent human suffering or capacity for action, rather they are simply concerned with determining the most optimal or efficient arrangement of a sequence of events. As Simpson argues, a practice, whilst always aiming

⁵⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁶⁰ Ricoeur cites Kermode on this point: Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 75-77. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, 37.

⁶¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 152.

towards particular ends or outcomes, is constituted by the temporal *flux* that is sustained by capable and vulnerable participants over the course of a practice. The meaning of a practice is located in this indeterminate space, i.e., it cannot be anticipated in advance. A technological attitude misunderstands this feature of practice.

For example, the practice of the ‘family dinner’, whose ends to indeed include the simple need to feed the members of the family, is replaced by the microwave, the T.V. dinner, the fast-food restaurant, and the drive-through window. These innovations are representative of the increasing need to control and shorten the time taken to reach the representable ‘goal’ of the family dinner. However, what constitutes the family dinner as a *practice*, is, to use Catherine Pickstock’s term, the *non-identical repetition* of the family meal. That is, even though the same goal is repeated at a similar time every night (feeding the family), the non-identical nature of this repetition is what constitutes the family as a *family* (a “thing”).⁶² It is by way of the fluctuations and variations occurring over the course of an indeterminate temporal duration that a meaningful and identifiable practical relation can emerge. In contrast, using a microwave and sitting in front of the television, or choosing the drive-through option at a restaurant, indeed reduces the time taken to prepare a meal, eat, converse, argue, and so on, but the family-as-a-thing is reduced to an identical repetition, it cannot grow or evolve over time. For Simpson, the repetitions associated with practices become a productive form of critiquing the technological rationality which threatens to eclipse our meaningful relation to our environments, “the growing hegemony of the temporality of making (*techne*), at the expense of temporalities of doing (*praxis*), stands as a threat to the continued presence of meaningful differences in our lives and to there being meaning in a life as a whole.”⁶³

However, a question which will be raised in the second part of this chapter, and which will influence the arguments of Section Four, is: are narratives associated with a “temporality of doing (*praxis*)” or a “temporality of making (*techne*)”? I will argue that narratives, according to Ricoeur, contain both modes of temporality, and that it is the difference between the two that constitutes appropriation *as* appropriation, since it is the *techne* character of narrative which also renders it ‘foreign’.

⁶² “the mark of thingness seems to be consistency and continuity despite variation”, Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity: The Literary Agenda* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 11.

⁶³ Lorenzo C. Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge 1995).⁶³.

In terms of *representing* the mode of non-identical repetition associated with practice, narratives are more likely to succeed compared with technologies. This is due to the *mimetic* character of narrative representation. Narratives themselves are already constituted through a series of non-identical repetitions – the patterned repetitions of everyday life (*mimesis*₁), are translated into a narrative mode (*mimesis*₂), which are then repeated through the act of reading (*mimesis*₃). Each stage is different from the other, but each also attempts to *fulfil* the other, therefore there is a *productive circularity* – circular in that the pre-figurative, figurative, and re-figurative moments are all related by referring to the same thing, and productive in the sense that the *differences* and variations of each stage unfold or deepen this ‘same’ reference. For Catherine Pickstock, non-identical repetition precedes in a “serpentine” manner; in order to move forward through time whilst remaining constant, the thing must repeatedly turn back on itself, and then forward again, “A snake moves by twisting itself up to marshal energy, and by untwisting itself in order to deploy energy to move forwards. Unlike a motor car, it has to bend and twist itself internally in order to inscribe its snake-like passage externally.”⁶⁴ The same is true here of the *mimetic* character of narrative, in order to become disclosive, the same reference is repeated in different ways across the stages. The detour through Simpson’s highly critical account of technology helps to highlight the ways that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach, in contrast, remains open to questions of technique, considered at this mimetic level.

4.1 TECHNOLOGY AND TIME

As with Ricoeur’s critical account of psychoanalytic technique taken in isolation, Simpson’s analysis of technologies and time argues that the problem with modern technology is that it *alienates* us from the temporal flux of *practice*. Similar to psychoanalysis, where *meaning* is a feature of the dialogical, analytic experience, Simpson reads practice as a human space where meaningful relations can be disclosed. Meaning cannot be anticipated in advance. It can only be encountered in the concrete experience of learning through non-identical repetitions. Whereas technology approaches time through the attitude of linear *planning*, the meaningful repetitions of *practice* follow the serpentine motion non-identical repetition outlined by Pickstock. Practical repetitions contribute to the formation of a self that is more concrete and inscribed within a particular outlook, on the one hand, and more adaptive and capable of bearing change and variation, on the other, “The mark of strength of a thing as an engrained

⁶⁴ Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity*, 30.

habitude would be its spontaneity and adaptability, since a string disposition is not merely fixed and stubborn but capable of originality and improvisation.”⁶⁵ According to Simpson, modern technology alienates us from these experiences since it offers easy applications and displaces the need to “work-through” a situation. A practice-oriented approach recognizes that meaning is a complex phenomenon that is arrived at through deliberations and practical judgements originating from *within* the procedure or practice itself, rather than being derived in advance using an external theory or method.

This approach to practice is continuous with a hermeneutic one. Hermeneutics is firstly a confrontation with actual texts and discourse, not a confrontation with theoretical structures. Owing to the temporal nature of the reading experience, time is an immanent property of meaning, one which cannot be reduced through systemization or rationalization. A text or situation cannot be read ‘instantaneously’. There is always the synthesizing activity of a subject/participant (comportment), as well as the variable nature of practices themselves (history, dialectic of tradition/innovation). Both processes are always ‘in-between’, and resist any unmediated grasping of their contents.

As Michel Foucault has noted, hermeneutic understanding, then, involves a degree of ‘subjection’ to these indeterminate features of practice.⁶⁶ In order to become a subject, one has to ‘subject’ oneself to external constraints. The hermeneutic wager is that giving up ‘control’ of a situation allows one to perceive and understand it better. Control, in this sense, would refer to ‘knowledge of’ a situation, especially theoretical knowledge (*episteme*). Giving up the types of control gained through the certainty of theoretical knowledge leaves one in a vulnerable, uncertain position, but it is this uncertainty that allows an individual to develop a mastery of a practice. One becomes a hermeneutic subject through this process of subjectivation; by allowing a text to instruct, to subject oneself to it rather than having it as an object of study, its full implications are allowed to unfold. It becomes not only a source of knowledge and information, but also a potential source of transformation.

This approach embraces vulnerability as a necessary condition of understanding and self-transformation. In contrast, the technological attitude, according to Simpson, views the

⁶⁵ Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity*, 31.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-82*, Gros, Frédéric (ed.), translated from French by Graham Burchell, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

experience of vulnerability as ‘alienating’, and as something to be avoided when possible.

Simpson writes:

Technology, in its attempt to subdue time’s characteristic flux, aims to “domesticate” time by harnessing the future predictability and reliability to the present. As a result, being in time comes to be viewed as an alienating rather than as a productive condition. I suggest further that, in predisposing us to experience time as the “other” to be subdued or annihilated, technological civilization threatens to marginalize project of meaningful doing, the stuff of which stories are made.⁶⁷

Here, we can see that what Simpson sees as threatened by technological civilization is what Ricoeur calls *mimesis*₁, the living, material configurations from which narratives are drawn. As technological attitudes become more dominant, we become more alienated from, and inclined to guard against, all those ‘chance’ aspects of lived experience, the twists and turns of human life that are not ‘preprogramed’ or ordered through the technological representations of time, that provoke reflection on ourselves and the formation of a narrative self. For example, not so long ago travelling across the Atlantic Ocean involved boarding a ship and journeying for a long period of time. Upon arrival at your destination, your life may have been profoundly altered, you arrive in a ‘new world’, both in the sense of a new geographical location, as well as potentially having a new ‘worldview’. Today, the journey has been transformed by technology; you board a plane and the journey lasts only several hours. You are served refreshments and watch a few movies. Your arrival in a ‘new world’ is no longer an event of the same proportions. In this sense, the symbolic networks of the lifeworld have indeed been altered through multiple technological innovations. For Simpson, these alterations are ultimately nihilistic - a prenarrative field of experience whose codes encourage us to act in uniform, efficient ways ultimately eclipses, precisely, the ‘prenarrative’ sense of this field. ‘Potential’ stories, as Ricoeur calls them, begin to fade away.

In short, like the long journey across the Atlantic, we *endure* praxis; repetitions are not carried out to better ‘optimize’ an action leading to a production, but rather are carried out for their own sake, so that one can learn a practice well and better understand it. It is in this sense that practice always has a duration, and technology, according to Simpson, views this duration as dangerous because of the threat of alienation it implies. A hermeneutics of practice, on the other hand, views the encounter with the other (including the self as other) as necessary in the process of self-formation and transformation. Practical understanding is powerful *because* it

⁶⁷ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 43.

often ‘alienates’ us from ourselves, allowing previously unseen or unfelt expectations to come to the fore and be productively challenged.

Below, Simpson’s critique of technology will be explored further. His reading helps to articulate crucial features of hermeneutic practice, and the way in which these features provide a strong foundation for a criticism of modern technology. Importantly, technologies and practices are drawn closely together in certain respects – both involve relations to history, meaning, and representation. In the end, what differentiates them is a question of attitude or comportment. It is not technology as such that is a problem, but the way in which it becomes a part of the fabric of everyday life, and in doing so alienates us from a risky confrontation with practices. However, it will also be suggested that Simpson’s strong approach, which argues that technologies alienate us from practice, ultimately conceals the way that technologies depend on practical applications and regulation by human interlocutors. This line of thought follows Simondon’s lead, who argues that fears regarding the ‘automatic’ nature of technology end up alienating us from understanding them better. Like narrative, many technologies depend on a process of *concretization*, a process that occurs in practice and over time (Chapter 7).

4.1.1 TIME AND PLANNING

For Simpson, the time of technology and the time of practice are in tension with one another. Although the following terms are not Simpson’s own, the time of technology is seen as ‘nonsensical’ or paradoxical, while the time of praxis is a time of ‘sense-making’. Simpson introduces the distinction by drawing on Kierkegaard and the difference between an internal and external history, “In the case of external history, time is that through which we must move in order to achieve a goal or realize a moment of significance.”⁶⁸ An internal history is instead marked by *repetition*, which “moves through time, where it is at home, grappling with time and exposing itself to the latter’s flux; its task is to persevere in time and to maintain its singleness, identity and continuity within the flux.”⁶⁹ Drawing on hermeneutic theories, Simpson parallels repetition in this sense with *application*, that is, it relates to actions that are at once continuous with tradition and the already given, whilst also being unique appropriations of these pasts. In this sense, it is never a “repetition of the same”, but “effects a fusion of the

⁶⁸ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 50.

⁶⁹ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 51.

horizons of the past and the future.”⁷⁰ In other words, the repetition of praxis views time as a continuum, with the past and future seen as being immanent to the present, not as that which can be escaped from or progressed towards. Transmission of tradition through repetition allows for the explication of prior pre-understandings, whilst also carrying them forward toward future repetitions and revisions.

Technology, on the other hand, has the opposite attitude to the past and future. The temporality of technology (of the technological project) appears through the temporality of *planning*. The notion of planning is important since it is what distinguishes technology from science and metaphysics. Whereas science and metaphysics view time as “a series of wholly indifferent ‘nows’”,⁷¹ that is, they remain indifferent to questions of *history*, plans require an anticipation of and concern for the future, “The time of planning is a time of reckoning, where it is always a matter of its being ‘time for’ something, where it makes sense to speak of the ‘right time’.”⁷² Furthermore, ideas of ‘progress’ and ‘innovation’ that also underpin the technological project, imply an incorporation of a concept of the future: “The possibility of progress presupposes the possibility of novelty and the reality of becoming. The idea of progress presupposes an understanding of the future as the locus of that which does or can differ in some essential respect from that which now is or which has been.”⁷³

However, even though technology anticipates a future, it simultaneously aims to “domesticate” it. That is, it does not anticipate the future as such, but only the linearly conceived future that is the successful outcome of a program or plan. The *need* for planning presupposes an ‘open future’, whilst the attitude of progress presupposes the future is controllable (closed). In other words, the concern for control and progress arises from a recognition of the effects of history, as an attempt to erase them by removing contingency,

This understanding of the future is compromised by technology’s rancour against the uncontrolled past and its concern with predicting and controlling the future... This can be argued to be the will for the closure of history... *Technology is fundamentally an expression of and response to the “terror of history.”* It represents our quest for security against novelty, through control and order, while presupposing the possibility of novelty. It is the use of created novelty to forestall or defuse contingent novelty.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 57.

⁷¹ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 52.

⁷² Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 52-53.

⁷³ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 53.

⁷⁴ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 53-54. Emphasis in original. As a side note, an example of planning for *contingent* novelty might be the scheduling of a ‘festival’ in Gadamer’s sense. The festival sits within the calendar but is also outside, since the temporality associated with it is different than the daily routine of work, etc. Festivals ‘work’ by the way they embrace the ‘flux’ of time in their organization.

In this sense, technology and praxis both differ from science and metaphysics in that they are responses to history. However, whereas technology aims to “domesticate” this historical time, praxis aim to actualise it further and deepen it. The problem here, for Simpson, is a conflict of *interests* or attitudes. Praxis is not only a mode of productive transmission of the past, it also produces *self*-knowledge: “The implicit or latent self is brought forward in action and experience which render it explicit or manifest. The explicit “presentation” allows self-recognition which, when appropriated, effects a “return to the self,” but a self that has been transformed through its newly appropriated self-understanding.”⁷⁵ Because of this, praxis is also more *binding*, since our own self-understanding and identity is at stake, for example, when making promises. Technology, on the other hand, has no place for the ‘self’. Whilst all historical projects, even technological ones, cannot avoid the necessity of human actors and participants, technological projects reduce the singularity of a self and replace it with the “human factor”,

[Technology] promises to grant us autonomy, make of us wholes. Yet it requires that we remain parts, that we subordinate ourselves to larger wholes. As Jacques Ellul and others have amply documented, progress in the control of objectified natural and social processes requires techniques for integrating the “human factor” into the whole in order to fully realise technology’s potential.⁷⁶

These differing attitudes to time, history, and the self are important for the discussion of narrative. Narrative structures and techniques do indeed ‘reckon’ with time, they render it linear (beginning-middle-end), manipulate it to effect pleasure in us (delays, suspense), and even, at the level of ‘meta-narratives’, interpellate us and render us “subordinate to larger (ideological) wholes.” On the other hand, aside from these rational, structural characteristics, they are also *intelligible*, or readable. In this way they presuppose a ‘who’ in the process of actualisation, whilst according to Simpson, technology treats us only as a ‘what’.

To identify technology with planning helps us to situate it in relation to history, tradition, and innovation. However, we must ask whether the reckoning that is associated with technology is entirely justified. We could say that *technological rationality* fits well into this description, but the practical concerns of a craftsman or engineer are perhaps not as bound to this understanding

⁷⁵ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 58.

⁷⁶ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 54-55.

of planning. Certainly, the figure of a ‘social engineer’ fits well here, and in this sense, it is appropriate that Simpson references Ellul. However, as we will explore in later chapters, the indeterminacy of technological application is often openly accepted as a positive factor by designers. Planning is a feature of human life, and whether it arises due to our tool-use is an open question. More important than recognising the contradictions in planning is recognizing the *horizon* or limit of any plan. As Gadamer writes, parents may often try to ‘spare’ their children certain experiences, but “experience as a whole is not something anybody can be spared.”⁷⁷ Just as planning provides us with a sense of security and ‘domesticity’, inherent in any plan is a negative experience of its limits, and through this negative experience we gain a sense of both of our finitude and the infinitude of the ‘whole’ of experience. In Ricoeur’s terms, we understand ourselves *better*. As was explored in previous chapters, the dialectic between distanciation and belonging can also become a *virtuous* circle, in that distanciated representations or valuations can become relational moments of praxis (as in the case of psychoanalytic technique).

However, for Simpson, it would be impossible to experience the failure of a technological plan in the reflective sense, since technologies are essentially *worldless*. Failures in technologies occur at the level of *valuation* rather than *meaning*. Even if the technological device that I am working with breaks down, I will simply seek a way to repair or replace it; my *self-identity* is not at stake (this is the dangerous attraction of technology for Simpson). If I am profoundly altered by an encounter with a narrative, on the other hand, failures caused by this new worldview will provoke self-reflection and revision. In this way, technology provokes a worldless mode of engagement with practice and history.

4.1.2 TECHNOLOGY AND WORLDHOOD

One of the reasons why technologies threaten narrative and practical understandings of the world, is because they tend to conflate ‘meaning’ with ‘value’. For Simpson, meaning has “the character of the ‘always already’ in which processes of life and action ‘dwell’.”⁷⁸ Meaningful experiences are something that happen *to* us, or that we participate *in*, rather than being something we can have before us, as a “pseudo-object that we can approach or recede from”.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 350.

⁷⁸ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 47.

⁷⁹ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 47.

Values, on the other hand, are *derived* from practices and relations of meaning, they are interpretations and representations of practices. The relationship between the two is one of “conditioning to conditioned” - just as the Kantian categories cannot be experienced, meaning cannot be represented.⁸⁰

In this way, an evaluation or representation of a practice always involves a transformation of its meaning. The result of this transformation process is a ‘rationalization’ of practice,

As meaning becomes thematized as value, the manifold connections which operate in part “behind our backs” and which, through informing and shaping our experience, predispose us to experience in a characteristic way, are transformed into premises. The validity of these value-premises, apart from the referential anchoring in the meaning which gave rise to the value, stands or falls with the rational evaluation of those premises.⁸¹

An ‘evaluation’ of a practice is a form of rational anticipation. Our practices always have limits and contours that enable the emergence of meaning. The shift from participation to valuation, though, involves representing these limits as separate, and separable, from practices. The goal or outcome of a practice is one such limit, with a finished product, for example, standing as a measurable unit of value, a conditioned outcome of the conditions of the practice. Isolating and evaluating this product using rational or scientific criteria is a way of framing practice that eschews its meaning. According to Simpson, “Technological activity is result-anticipating activity. Its success is assessed in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness with which it achieves its result.”⁸² We could imagine, as simple example, early agricultural practices as emerging from the given conditions of the land, climate, seasonal cycles, needs of a particular community, etc. When the ‘product’ of these practices is valued in-itself, rational, technological methods of producing the same product can be derived, and the prior forms of ‘dwelling’ become ‘redundant’ from a results-oriented perspective. The example Simpson provides is of the family meal, whose technological value lies in the ends associated with ‘feeding the family’. This end, once represented as such, can be condensed through various technological systems such as microwaves. Why ‘sit-in’ at McDonalds when there is the ‘drive-through’ option?⁸³ The problem here is that ‘ends’ cease to become ends-in-themselves, and

⁸⁰ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 46.

⁸¹ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 47.

⁸² Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 48.

⁸³ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 45.

instead are transfigured into means to further ends. By removing the indeterminate, uncanny, time-relations of practice, technologies collapse the ‘world’ of a practice, and, “when ends become worldless they can collapse into means.”⁸⁴

That is not to say that technology and technological development do not possess a ‘life’ of their own. But this life is a shallow, worldless life; “We might well understand science and technology as forms of life, but they are forms of life lacking in “depth”; that is, they are essentially worldless.”⁸⁵ They are worldless because, like signs, they proceed through the logic of “univocal determination”.⁸⁶ For example, the world of a narrative is constituted through both events *and* characters, whereas, it would seem from Simpson’s perspective technology deals with *events*, and renders ‘characters’ as mere ‘operators’. Events become separable from the agents that bring them about, agents with particular motivations and worldviews. Human repetition is marked by the process of *Bildung*, or self-formation, where each repetition is part of a wider experience of learning and transformation, while technological or scientific repetitions are repetitions of the same process regardless of contexts or agents. Every time you switch your computer on it runs the same set of operations, with, significantly, no variations in the time-taken to run these operations, and no difference in the quality or understandings of this time. In this sense, for Simpson, technological rationality is a fixed, homogenous structure defined through a single purpose; the transfiguration of an indeterminate (flux-like) whole of praxis into the linear succession of a technical operation. Rather than feeling ‘at home’ with technologies, we should return to our more originary ‘home’ of meaning and practice.

Yet, does this approach not alienate us from the technologies themselves? Technologies become ‘inhuman’, incapable of extracting the same relations of meaning from praxis as humans are, incapable of anticipating human vulnerability and finitude. The other option, which I am advocating, is to shift our perspective so that we extend our same understandings of practice and worldhood to the technologies themselves. To see technological relations as *living* and therefore as indeterminate and open as human relations. And, vice versa, to recognize more fully what Ricoeur calls the ‘sedimented’ aspects of human practice and action itself, that is, those aspects of action which are codified and already ‘technical’ or systematic. Simpson is right in that there is a ‘culture’ of technological rationality that needs to be challenged, yet this

⁸⁴ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 45.

⁸⁵ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 48.

⁸⁶ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 48.

culture exists at the ideological level. It is manifested in an overly-*literal* reading of technology, as opposed to an encounter with its *symbolic* features. Technologies also exist *within* practices and history, and in this sense, they are as vulnerable to the uncertainties of application as humans are. Technologies also ‘fail’ to reach their intentional ends, and these failures become conditions for better designs, or for different kinds of applications than those which were intended.

The ultimate problem with technological representation (the world-picture it creates), as Simpson sees it, is that it *distances* us from an immediate participation in a practice, “Such a world, a product of our representing activity, loses its claim on us. *The commitments, concerns and interests which root us can find no place on this canvas*, even though they may be constitutive of its production.”⁸⁷ However, Ricoeur continually places emphasis not on commitment as such, but on *renewed* commitment, a commitment that has been returned to again following a detour or reflection. Narrative is so important, not because it represents the world directly, but because it takes us *away* from our worlds and the situations we belong to, so that we can return again with an alternative understanding of those worlds. Just as narratives appropriate human time by translating and transforming it into a narrative mode, why not see technologies as modes of appropriating time? From Simpson’s more humanist perspective, technologies indeed seem to threaten human commitments, however, technologies themselves have their own individual commitments and logics, expressed through the uniqueness of a design, for example. This internal technological commitments will be explored further in Chapter 7, in relation to Simondon. Accepting these features of technologies means that the hermeneutic task would involve finding ways to engage meaningfully with this novel modes of commitment and logic. One way of finding renewed commitments within the alienated commitments of technologies would be in re-appropriating technologies back into praxis. This would enable subjects to exploring the unanticipated applications opened up by the distancing effects of technologies. According to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, this is possible at the practical or poetic level. Narrative understanding is one such way of mediating a relation between distanced representations and the modes of understanding associated with practical being-in-the-world.

⁸⁷ Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, 44. Emphasis added.

4.2 FEATURES OF THE NARRATIVE OBJECT

Simpson's characterization of the technological attitude to time as standing against the practical understanding of meaningful duration recalls Heidegger's criticism of 'ordinary' time that stands against, and causes forgetfulness of, our more 'authentic' relation to the world as revealed through care (*Sorge*).⁸⁸ While Ricoeur agrees with Heidegger's claim that our relation to the world is *fundamentally* one of care, he disagrees that this mode of being is more authentic than existing within the 'everyday' or derived time of modern society. As has already been discussed, Ricoeur aims to account for the mixed nature of practical understanding as involving relations of both belonging (care) and the distanciated structures that mediate this belonging. Structures and representations that mediate our practical participation in the world, for example clocks and calendars, indeed displace us from a more 'primordial' relation to the world, but in doing so also disclose new possibilities for action. Furthermore, the co-existence of distanciated forms of mediation and immediate, practical concerns is *inevitable* for Ricoeur. Practical relations with the world always have an intentional structure that can be clarified and translated into structural modes of expression. A farmer who participates 'authentically' in the tending of the land and growing of crops, even independently of the support of calendars and clocks, does so in a way that "non-identically repeats" a relation to the world (i.e., through relations of anticipation and retention), and therefore, over time would inevitably develop a recognition of certain features that could be separated from this experience and identified as constants,

Thus, Dasein's "being ahead of itself," for instance, can already be seen to harbor certain features of datability—it seems unlikely that after several seasons of planting my crops, after all, I should fail to notice *some* recurrent markers of seasonal change corresponding to my actions—and with them the beginnings of an inevitable fall into Heidegger's external or "ordinary" time.⁸⁹

Therefore, a purely phenomenological account of temporality leads to an encounter with the question of the time that persists in the material world, independently of me, since this time effects temporal experience externally, or at a distance, and provides a framework for translating lived experience into a repeatable, identifiable format. However, these external,

⁸⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Blackwell Publishing, 1962), Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

⁸⁹ William C. Dowling, *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 33.

derived representations of lived experience are themselves limited by the continued interactions of living, acting subjects. For Ricoeur, calendar time opens out onto the time of the *now*, or the time of *initiative*. For example, certain dates are rendered *significant* through the actions and histories of particular communities.

Narratives, in contrast to both the time of technology (“time of the world”) and the lived experience of time (“time of the soul”), offer a “third time” that mediates both. The *totalizing* tendency of the “time of the world” (the time of the plot which renders each event of a narrative meaningful in relation to the whole), is *frustrated* by the “time of the soul” that is inscribed within the plot in narrative time,

It is the ‘objective’, cosmological time onto which lived time is inscribed which provides the basis of its totalization; and the fundamentally open structure of lived time itself, however successfully refigured, that frustrates it. The totalizations of historical narratives (mimesis 2) are fractured as they run up against the open futural time of the active reader, which they refigure (mimesis 3), but which, ultimately, they can never fully enclose. Or, to put it another way, the present is characterised by the basic autonomy of a de-totalizing ‘space of experience’.⁹⁰

Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative mediation provides a way of reconceiving the tension outlined by Simpson between the time of practices and the time of technology. The *application* of a narrative work within the world of action (*mimesis*₃) is understood as a “de-totalizing” act because it productively *responds* to the totalizing features of narrative. The features of narrative that lead to this conception of the space of application as an open, indeterminate negotiation between works and human actions will be highlighted here. Firstly, narrative emplotment is conceived of by Ricoeur as a dynamic *integration* or configuration of heterogeneous parts into a concordant whole. This activity differentiates narrative from life and constitutes it as a *work*. Secondly, as a work it produces its own temporality that mirrors human action and therefore renders it *intelligible*. This means that any structural comprehension of narrative must be related to hermeneutic questions of understanding and reception. Finally, narrative application is understood as a *productive* activity. The re-appropriation of narrative worlds back into the lifeworld is a difficult procedure – the nature of hermeneutic application, which renders certain features of a work significant or insignificant, means that every act of reading *generates* a new understanding of the same work.

⁹⁰ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time* (London: Verso, 1995), 53.

Ricoeur's work on narrative in *Time and Narrative* centres around the thesis that, "*Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.*"⁹¹ Narrative and time are, for Ricoeur, locked in a relation of mutual becoming. The first part of the statement continues Ricoeur's break with Heidegger by advocating the crucial, epistemological function of mediation in relation to our 'human' understanding of temporal being. Temporality is not only lived and felt and the level of primordial being-toward-death, it is also an everyday, common, and historical phenomena, that is 'counted' or articulated through a plurality of finite, and shifting, modes of representation, with the most exemplary of these being narratives. This first part of the statement also has a bearing on our understanding of the human-technology relation. If technologies do not articulate time through a 'narrative mode', does that mean their time is non-human? This, precisely, may be the power of technology, from a post-modern or post-structuralist perspective. It allows for the exploration of an 'inhuman', or posthuman, space of becoming. We are no longer bound to narrative forms of the past and their corresponding understandings of (human) temporality, and are instead free to travel along inhuman time-scales, intense 'lines of flight' and so on. On the other hand, this is also something to be cautious of when it comes to technology. As we saw, for Simpson the time of technology is a linearized time that alienates us from the temporal flux of human practice. In this account, the time of technology is the time of "planning", whereas the time of practice is one of learning and meaningful repetition. Narrative, seen as a practical (poietic) way of appropriating and rendering-meaningful cosmic time, would be seen from this perspective to be opposed to technological time. The repetition and transmissions of narratives is different to the repetition encountered with technological processes.

The second aspect of the quote, where narrative becomes a condition for temporal existence, is also important. Narratives are not only ways of appropriating and making sense of temporal experience, they also affect and condition our experience of the world. They can do so in a more immediate sense, as in the case of the transformative experience of a powerful work of literature, or they can do it in a more 'invisible' or unconscious sense, as in the case of ideological narratives or even the narratives underlying the constructed apparatus for measuring time (the mythological and cosmological roots of calendar time, etc.).

⁹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1984), 52. Emphasis in original.

It is the productive circularity of Ricoeur's core thesis on narrative and time that is of interest here. Narratives are not only practical means of rendering time sensible, they are also objects that stand against experience, possessing a life of their own and a series of effects that reach beyond the temporal relations they aim to represent. They not only imitate human affairs, they also form worlds of their own. The logic at work here is similar to the logic we have been exploring already. However, what the discussion of narrative adds is a particular emphasis on the way in which acts of *configuration* inform our understandings of time. Technologies, too, gather together heterogeneous parts and relations into concordant 'wholes', which initially emerge from practical experience, but also stand against it in their artificiality. In this sense, both narratives and technologies share in the process of what Gilbert Simondon calls 'concretization' (Chapter 7). The way they are formed is both inventive and natural; inventive in the sense that narratives involve productive imaginative leaps beyond current norms and understandings, yet natural in the sense that as configurations they gain an independence from both author and context, they become autonomous, transmissible units or 'worlds' in themselves. Similar to the way a natural scientist approaches an autonomous living being, the reader of the text approaches something which at first is unknown, has a life/world of its own, is falsifiable, and so on. For Simondon, technologies follow a similar path to narratives, from abstraction to concrete existence. The *configurational* features of narrative, highlighted by Ricoeur, have already been applied as a framework for understanding the ways technologies, against Simons' characterization, also possess modes of temporal organisation that are *mimetic*, i.e., that correspond with human understandings of time.

With these points in mind, this section will explore the features of narrative techniques of configuration, with emphasis on the practical/intelligible character of narrative representation.

4.2.1 INTEGRATION

What Aristotle refers to as a plot is not a static structure, but an operation, an integrative process, one that, I hope to show, is completed only in the reader or spectator, that is, in the living receiver of the told story. By an "integrative process" I mean the work of composition that confers on the narrated story an identity that we can call a dynamic one.⁹²

⁹² Paul Ricoeur, "Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator", in *On Psychoanalysis*, eds. Jean-Louis Schlegel and Catherine Goldenstein, trans. David Pellauer (Polity, 2012), 188.

A much focused on aspect of Ricoeur's theory of narrative is its emphasis on the *ordering* function of emplotment. When linked to questions of the philosophical identity of the self, this ordering principle can become a powerful way of describing the coherency of a self. On the other hand, the image of 'continuity', and even grandeur, which emerges from a narrative understanding of the self can potentially be linked to a needlessly excessive concern with the self. It is also easy to see the difficulty of Ricoeur's emphasis on order and plot in light of actual genres of narrative which work to undermine and deconstruct their own totality, for example, the 'antinovel'. Ricoeur's own reply to works like *Ulysses*, in which the configurative function of narrative is constantly interrupted, is that "in such an extreme case, it is the reader, almost abandoned by the work, who carries the burden of emplotment."⁹³ This statement, at first sight, seems to undermine the intention and radical impact of these works.

However, as indicated by the opening quote, the purpose of this section is to explore the *dynamic* aspects of this ordering, which would challenge any association of it with an easy-won 'reconciliation', 'agreement', 'self-assurance', etc. What is at stake is Ricoeur's understanding of 'repetition', designated by the concept mimesis, and the implications this approach will have on the types of repetition associated with technology. Repetition is what disrupts the order of the plot, and, likewise, the order of the plot is what disrupts the similitude of repetition.

In Ricoeur's theory of narrative, repetition occurs at three levels. The first is the pre-figurative level, the level of participatory being-in-the-world. If there is structuration at this level it is in terms of *habit*, or of the 'involuntary' aspects of movement and repetition, to use Ricoeur's category from *Freedom and Nature*.⁹⁴ These repetitions are marked by *contingency*; be it in terms of contingent customs or environmental restrictions, and it is the "sorrow" of this contingency that gives rise to the will to narrate.⁹⁵ Narration in this sense becomes a mode of re-marking, or recording, via language, already marked out territories that have been created through habit and custom, so that they can be clarified and translated into a reflective mode of understanding.

⁹³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 77.

⁹⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erasm V. Kohák (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois, 1966).

⁹⁵ Ricoeur *Freedom and Nature*, 450-456.

This re-marking of previously established paths or traditions is, again, a form of repetition. Yet, it is a repetition that necessarily fails, since it is carried out in another register, one whose form arises within linguistic modes of articulation, rather than ‘lived’ or habitual modes of being. It is precisely this difference or failure that renders the configurative act of narrative *productive* in terms of understanding. As Gert-Jan van der Heiden points out, *mimesis*₂ is both a displacement of prior, implicit relations, and an *origin* point for the understanding of these relations, “mimesis is presupposed in the understanding of the sameness and the otherness of the life world and the historical past with regard to the fictional world and the historical narrative. Hence, Ricoeur’s mimesis is an original mimesis, but in a particular sense: *the understanding originates in mimesis*.”⁹⁶ Narrative, understood in this productive sense, provides a figure against which we can understand a succession. It gathers together successive, disparate events and characters into a meaningful whole, aiming to replicate the successive events under the guise of unity. However, the nature of the ‘figure’ itself is also in question, since it is defined as an “integrative process”, not a fixed representation.

The reason Ricoeur highlights this dynamic or processual character of narrative representation is so that he can account for the two distinct, but interrelated, compositional operations: imitation and emplotment. Both terms remain in dialectical tension with one another and, hence the dynamism of narrative. The conflict between imitation and emplotment originates in Aristotle. As with Ricoeur’s reading of structuralism earlier, he aims to understand both these terms as *operations* rather than fixed structures.⁹⁷ When Aristotle defines *muthos* (emplotment) as “The organisation of the events” (*ē tōn pragmatōn sustasis*), Ricoeur stresses that composition/organisation is not a ‘system’ but an act, “the active sense of organizing the events into a system, so as to mark the operative character of all the concepts in the *Poetics*.”⁹⁸ Whereas *mimesis*, or imitation, refers to the activity or replicating or ‘representing’ human actions, *muthos*/emplotment refers to the activity of organising these representations into a coherent system. Drawing on the metaphorical implications of the semantic equivalence between ‘emplotment’ and ‘composition’, Ricoeur, following Aristotle, also stresses the musical aspects of this work; it is achieved through the medium of “metrical language”. Its order is the order of ‘harmony’ or concordance. There are central melodic keys; tragic, comic, epic, which will govern the process of organisation.

⁹⁶ Van der Heiden, *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language*, 203. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 33.

⁹⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 33.

In the poetic activity of narrative, then, there are two competing structuring operations. Imitation refers a narrative back to its context, the world of human action, while emplotment works through its reference to the final concordance of the narrative itself. These conflicting references combined produce the effect of a *translation* of action, rather than a replica. Just as the translator's task involves serving "two masters",⁹⁹ the work of narrative composition struggles between the replication of human action and the "melodic" demands of the plot, akin to a language, with its own rules and customs. Importantly, it is the ordering activity of emplotment, the wandering search for harmony in the act of composition, that establishes the crucial, productive difference between the work and its intended object, human action. Although Ricoeur does insist on a correlation between imitation/repetition and emplotment, so that "action is the 'construct' of that construction that mimetic activity consists of"¹⁰⁰, the distinctiveness of each term in the pair mimesis-muthos means that the correlation "must not be pushed too far"¹⁰¹. If an accurate representation of human action is what is aimed for in mimesis, it is a noesis that is left "unfulfilled" in the Husserlian sense, "Aristotelian mimesis is not exhausted by the strict noematic correlation between representation and what is represented, but rather opens the way to an investigation of the referents of poetic activity intended by emplotment on the two sides [*en amont et en aval*] of mimesis/muthos."¹⁰²

Ricoeur's definition of narrative as a *concordant discordance* expresses this internal, conflictual struggle. Just as we saw earlier with the task of reflection and its struggle for clarity in spite of ambiguity, the work of narrating is a struggle for temporal unity 'in spite of' the successive nature of time. Narratives may be both concordant and discordant, but these terms represent *operations* or *progressions* in relation to the whole of the work. Whereas the aim of reflection is clarity of sense, the clarity of narrative is a 'harmonic' one; structural, yes, but a structure which incorporates both concordance and discordance. Arnold Schoenberg, in *Structural Functions of Harmony*, opens the book by distinguishing the act of composition from succession in a way that mirrors Ricoeur's understanding of structuration,

A *succession* is aimless; a *progression* aims for a definite goal...A *progression* has the function of establishing or contradicting a tonality...The centripetal function of progressions is exerted by stopping centrifugal tendencies, i.e., by establishing a tonality through the conquest of its contradictory elements.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "The Paradigm of Translation," in *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 115.

¹⁰⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, 35

¹⁰¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, 35

¹⁰² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, 238, fn. 10.

¹⁰³ Arnold Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, ed. Leonard Stein (Faber and Faber, 1954), 1-2.

The narrative object, for Ricoeur, also possesses this logic of ‘progression’; shifts in tone or course of a plot are reflective of the internal demands of the plot to render discordances concordant, and it is these features which both render a narrative *worldly* and, by implication, unfamiliar or different (in relation to our own experience).

However, the structural or harmonic aspects of narrative composition must not be pushed too far. The arrangement of a story is not only determined internally, as a negotiation between centrifugal and centripetal forces, between mere ‘episodes’ and a larger whole. It is also arranged so that is *followable*. That is, the act of composition is not only technical (artful), it is also *practical*; it must be capable of being received and grasped by an audience. The ‘figure’ of narrative is both organised/complete and open to interpretation/engagement. The art of narrating is the art of composing a means of communication.

Since narrative, as a mode of organisation, strives towards a ‘key’ it differentiates itself from the temporal experience of life, which Ricoeur argues, via Augustine, is marked by a fundamental discordance. The difference is not arbitrary, though. It is the condition for both the life of the narrative and for our understanding of lived experience. The difference conditions the life of the narrative because the “unfulfilled” content of narrative leaves open the possibility of future appropriations. A narrative ceases to be an object closed in on itself, bound to a certain historical time, and instead becomes a process, capable of being taken up again and again in different contexts. The ‘action’ it imitates is also the *future* action of readers or listeners who will be influenced by its content in radically new situations. From the other side, lived experience is also conditioned through the difference of narrative articulation because, although discordant and lacking in narrative phenomena such as ‘closure’, life is also a “story in search of a narrator.”¹⁰⁴ In this sense, the act of narrative is an entirely practical, and even natural, ‘response’ to questions or problems posed by lived experience. It is not an artificial escape into a fantasy-world, but rather emerges through practical experience with others which is always fraught with problems demanding a poetic solution. The ‘discordances’ of life, the lack of closure, the distended soul, the impossibility of a ‘present’, the frustrating lack of closure, are all also temporally constituted. Life is not ‘totally’ discordant, in a metaphysical sense, only our experience of it.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator”, 187.

4.2.2 INTELLIGIBILITY

Highlighting further the inherent *practical* character of narrative organisation, it is important to emphasise the nature of the narrative object itself (*mimesis*₂), which for Ricoeur is not a structure but a process of structuration, and therefore is identified not through its rational features, but through its intelligibility. Whereas narrative rationality arises from taking *mimesis*₂ in isolation, accounting for the intelligibility of narrative means acknowledging the interlocking of all three stages (*mimesis*_{1, 2, 3}). Taken as a structure, *mimesis*₂ can be explained using the scientific methods of linguistics. Taken as an intermediary position between *mimesis*₁ and *mimesis*₃, a narrative work can only be explained through the lens of practical intelligibility.

The term *mimesis*₂ designates the literary work or product itself. As a finished work, it possesses an objective character. It lends itself to scientific analysis and dissection. According to Ricoeur, this objective aspect of *mimesis*₂ is linked to “narrative rationality”, to the codified (semiotic) structures found expressed in narrative traditions, but ultimately located at the synchronic, virtual level. Semiotic approaches are distinguished by Ricoeur from his own through his understanding of the lived temporalities that are irreducibly inscribed in narratives. Whereas, at the level of linguistics, narrative structures can be rationalised and codified, their temporal character resists being reduced to a “simple chronology”.¹⁰⁵ Although, structurally, central moments of a narrative can be isolated and identified, the *passages* of time that hold these structural points together are far more indeterminate and ‘irrational’ for Ricoeur. Detours and procrastinations, on the way to fulfilling a “quest”, for example, are evidence that a narrative is never a simple sequence of events, but also a configuration or whole. In other words, the time taken between being given a quest/contract, and the successful fulfilling of this quest, is not presented, by narrative, as being linear; it involves distension, delay, suspense, and so on.¹⁰⁶ Two competing temporalities are always at work within the narrative, which Günther Müller calls *erzählte Zeit* (the actual time taken for the events described to unfold.) and *Erzählzeit* (time taken to recount these events). The plot not only orders events and causes into a representable form, it also does so in *teleological* way. The objective time of the world (*erzählte Zeit*) is translated into narrative time (*Erzählzeit*) in a way that draws out the

¹⁰⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 2*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 46-47.

¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 2*, 47.

significance or *intelligibility* of these events. Events that, in ‘real time’ may have taken years to occur can be reduced to a sentence in narrative, and similarly, an event that may have taken only a few seconds can be extended and described over the course of many pages, “Müller calls this process of transmutation *Raffung*, which may be translated as ‘pleating’ or ‘folding.’ For Ricoeur, its primary importance is that it represents a break or rupture with linear time, a transformation of Aristotle’s cosmic time into a time of human preoccupation or concern.”¹⁰⁷

For Ricoeur, any attempt to explain narrative structures using a rational framework is always a second order description, since the operations of inscribing lived time within narrative time are reflective of hermeneutic questions of belonging and tradition. The rules that govern the structure (second order) aspects of narrative are a “simulation of a narrative intelligence already there, a simulation that puts into play deep structures unknown to those who tell stories or who follow stories.”¹⁰⁸ Narrative intelligence, on the other hand, which is a practical intelligence and awareness of both the history and future of narrative, acknowledges that a narrative *work* is never a ‘finished’ product, since an inherent feature of the work is its capacity to *re-figure* life (the life of a reader). Narrative intelligence is the object of a hermeneutic account of narrative,

My enterprise differs from what many theoreticians of the text call textural semiotics. In my opinion, these theoreticians build up an abstraction, that of *mimesis*₂, by considering only the internal laws of the literary work. It is the task of hermeneutics, on the contrary, to reconstruct the set of operations by means of which a work arises from the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their own actions.¹⁰⁹

Only a hermeneutics of the text is capable of grasping the relation between the “internal laws” of the literary work and the nature of the interaction between the work and the embodied, historically-situated reader.

Due to this aspect of narrative temporality, which renders intelligible the human experiences of suffering and being capable, constructing a well-formed narrative is not only a technical project of rationally connecting together events, effects, characters, etc., so that the story as a whole ‘makes sense’. Rather, the construction of narrative is also a pragmatic endeavour. The delays, suspense, and distorted feelings that we experience through narrative are what bind us

¹⁰⁷ Dowling, *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative*, 48.

¹⁰⁸ Ricoeur, “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator”, 191.

¹⁰⁹ Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation”, in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (University of Toronto Press, 1991), 139-140

to it at a different level, a ‘human’ level. The ‘gathering together’ of disparate elements, the act of narrating, is both a play with structures *and* a play with temporality. Emplotment is also reflective of

an act of judgement, one arising from an act of “grasping together.” Or to put it another way, plot stems from a *praxis* of narrating, hence from a pragmatics of speaking, not from a grammar of *langue*. This pragmatics is presupposed by, but cannot be produced within, the framework of the grammar of roles.¹¹⁰

The work of emplotment combines a know-how of structures (genres, figures, etc.), with a practical wisdom that grasps the *temporal* nature of narrative. This difference, between ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing when’, will be taken up again in Section 4 with regard to the design of technologies.

4.2.3 PRODUCTION

So far, Ricoeur’s theory of narrative has helped us outline two dynamic aspects of a poetics; firstly, the integrated activity of representing and translating, which moves both toward life (imitation) and away from it (emplotment), secondly, the character of the work itself, whose communicative function is fulfilled *in time*, according to the variable laws of practical judgement, rather than in isolation, as a fixed, rational structure. This second feature, especially, leads us to the third. Narrative is on the one hand a ‘production’, an integrated whole with a beginning, middle, and end, but, it is also something that *produces*. This feature of narrative returns us again to our recurring theme of hermeneutic application.

Narrative production/appropriation is twofold; it is both anticipatory and retroactive. Its anticipatory character is manifested in what both Ricoeur and Wolfgang Iser discuss as the *activity* of reading. This activity is a negotiation process between reader and text, a dynamic, creative activity that produces a situation. The retroactive character of narrative production is revealed through its capacity to not just create new reading experiences, but to *transform* a tradition. This aspect of narrative production or application is what prevents it from becoming a vicious circle of repetition. Instead, Ricoeur speaks of “an endless spiral that would carry the mediation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 2, 44.

¹¹¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 72.

Anticipation

The significance of the literary object, for Iser, lies in its creative force. Its creative power is due to its capacity to persuasively challenge accepted or implicit conventions. Beginning with Austin's well-known analysis of speech acts, he highlights what Austin terms the "parasitic" nature of the poetic utterance. For Austin, the effect of an illocutionary act is not guaranteed by its utterance. Rather, its success is conditional; it must be appropriately acknowledged by the recipient in order for the act to have taken place, for the language to have 'done' something. A successful acknowledgment involves an awareness of the specific *situation* that the speech act is uttered in, "the precise nature of the *illocutionary force* in the speech act is something the recipient can derive only from the situational context. . . . Only when the recipient shows by his *responses* that he has correctly received the speaker's intention are the conditions fulfilled for the success of the linguistic action."¹¹² By contrast, as we have seen above, narratives and literature work by displacing and transcending contexts. But, as both Ricoeur and Iser demonstrate, a variety of rhetorical and persuasive strategies are adopted throughout the modes of communication employed by fiction, and, in this way, they possess a performative *force* in the same way as regular illocutionary speech acts do. There is, nevertheless, a strong degree of uncertainty in their reception; which situation and conventions are being indicated through a fictional perlocutionary act? Narratives employ rhetorical and pragmatic strategies to convince us, but what exactly they are aiming to convince us of remains unclear. Austin himself writes:

a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy...Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use...all this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.¹¹³

Poetic utterances are not counted as speech acts because they do not produce a linguistic action, yet, they are also *parasitic* - they imitate the qualities of speech acts but 'fail' at the level of application, "literature imitates the illocutionary speech act, but what is said does not produce what is meant. This raises the question of whether nothing at all is produced, or whether what is produced can only be regarded as a failure."¹¹⁴ It is this so-called "failure" that Iser draws on to argue for his, more dialogical, model of production. Whereas 'ordinary' speech acts

¹¹² Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1978, 57.

¹¹³ J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, (Oxford University Press, 1975), 22.

¹¹⁴ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 58-59.

produce action within acknowledged contexts, poetic acts work to produce new situations or variations on contexts, by initiating a dialogue between the dislocated text and located reader. It is precisely the *indeterminate* aspect of this dialogue that renders the act of reading a “situation-building” process.

Both Ricoeur and Iser, when discussing the act of reading, focus in on the significance of the relative indeterminacy of the process. For Iser, holes, lacuna and blanks in the text can help “stimulate” the creative response of the reader,¹¹⁵ and for Ricoeur, his formula for narrative – concordant *discordance* – is intended to highlight the disruptive effect of narrative strategies, as much as their ordering function, with the most classic of these strategies being *peripeteia*. Unlike an ‘object’ given in the phenomenological sense, the text is an incomplete object. The incompleteness is both structural, as in the case of systemic ‘noise’ and deviations, aimed more towards the response of the reader than the structural coherence/closure of the text itself,¹¹⁶ as well as temporal – the subject that perceives the object is a “wandering” one, “The relation between text and reader is therefore quite different from that between object and observer: instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint which travels along *inside* that which it has to apprehend.”¹¹⁷ This incompleteness renders the reading process one of *concretization*, “For Ingarden, a text is incomplete, first, in the sense that it offers different ‘schematic views’ that readers are asked to ‘concretize’. . . . However well-articulated the ‘schematic views’ proposed for our execution may be, the text resembles a musical score lending itself to different realizations.”¹¹⁸ In this way, a narrative gathers together, or arranges, incomplete worlds, whose significance only appears (becomes concrete) via a fusion of horizons between text and reader.

At the same time, fictional works are also “*rival* worlds”; they challenge current, practical understandings by presenting imagined alternatives. They gather together features and norms

¹¹⁵ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 169.

¹¹⁶ However, it is important to note that a structuralist approach may read these elements otherwise: “The fact remains, however, that a narrative is made up solely of functions: everything, in one way or another, is significant. *It is not so much a matter of art (on the part of the narrator) as it is a matter of structure.* Even though a detail may appear unequivocally trivial, impervious to any function, it would nonetheless end up pointing to its own absurdity or uselessness: everything has a meaning, or nothing has. To put it in a different way. Art does not acknowledge the existence of noise (in the informational sense of the word). It is a pure system: there are no wasted units, and there can never be any, however long, loose, or tenuous threads which link them to one of the levels of the story.” Roland Barthes, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”, *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, *On Narrative and Narratives* (Winter, 1975), 244-245, emphasis added.

¹¹⁷ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 109.

¹¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 3*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 167.

from ordinary lived experience and are seen as proposed solutions to ongoing questions. As we saw earlier, the *meaning* of a text, as opposed to its significance, also plays a role in the reading process. The idea of hermeneutic application and the fusion of horizons should not be separated from the processes of understanding and explanation. Reading is not only a “situation-building” process, but also a process of recovery or restoration. A text is not only a medium for communication between implied author and implied reader, but also has its place within a context or history. This feature is revealed through a reflective exegesis, and leads us to the question of the retroactivity of the text. That is, the “situation-building” process affects not only the self-understanding of the reader confronting the text, but also our understanding of the reality of the world of the text itself.

Retroaction

If the world of the text is something that is perpetually open to future readings, for Ricoeur this does not mean that its significance is endlessly deferred. Application is, indeed, a making concrete of the text’s meaning through the reading process, but this activity is always informed by the history of the text. In this sense, it is not only that the narrative acts as a set of ‘instructions’ which guide the reading process, but also, the reader brings to bear her own ‘concordances’ onto the discordances of the narrative. As with the case of the wandering viewpoint and the collapse of the subject-object distinction, from the perspective of history, text and reader are mutually determined and determining; both represent a history of effects whose interaction establishes a productive outcome on each side. On the side of the reader, the world of the text is appropriated, and the reader is transformed through this activity. On the side of the text, its meaning is also transformed, its past structures alter in a recognisable way.

Ricoeur’s three phases of narrative can be seen as three different forms of enactment. *Mimesis*₁ refers to the pre-narrative, implicit, enactments carried out in lived experience. *Mimesis*₂, the enactment of these pre-narrative experiences in plot-form. *Mimesis*₃ the re-interpretation of plot through re-appropriating it back into the lifeworld. As Ricoeur recognises, there is a circular relation between the three, yet he insists it is not a *vicious* circle. The re-appropriation of *mimesis*₃, essentially a repetition of *mimesis*₁ mediated by *mimesis*₂, is not a repetition of the same. Instead, Ricoeur insists on the dialectical character of the process. The formula, though, is not: ‘disorder (life) – order (plot) – ordered life (narrative understanding)’. Instead, we are first faced with the various paradoxes of time, presented by Augustine and others. To see life

as *purely* discordant or chaotic, would level out this paradox.¹¹⁹ These paradoxes are primarily speculative or theoretical, and without resolution at this level. In this sense, they open a space for a poetic solution. This solution does not seek to fully resolve the problems of time, in a theoretical sense, but to dramatize them and render them practically intelligible. The relation between time and narrative is indeed one of question and answer, or problem and solution, yet it is not one of discordance-concordance. This would lead to the ‘violence of interpretation’, to imposing a solution where there is none, i.e., imposing artificial order on disorder, “this is how it consoles us in the face of death.”¹²⁰ Neither is the act of narrating ‘redundant’, due to the ‘prenarrative’ aspect of life.

So, Ricoeur insists on a continuity across the difference between narrative and life, one which guards against a view of narrative-as-order, on the one hand, and of life-as-disorder, on the other. Instead, narratives, due to their poetic, as opposed to theoretical, nature, succeed through resisting closure, through being both concordant and discordant. Time, although seemingly unknowable and discordant, also presents us with a myriad of ‘potential stories’, or potential points of configuration and construction.

One of Ricoeur’s concrete examples for this phenomenon is taken from psychoanalysis.¹²¹ Here, narrative understanding plays a crucial role, precisely because of its relation to time. In psychoanalytic theory, there is often a temporal distance between an actual traumatic event, and the event taking effect in the subject’s consciousness. This may be due to various reasons, but for Lacan and Freud it is caused by the relationship between language and trauma; a traumatic event takes effect once we have a *name* for it (or understand that it ought to have a name). For this reason, Lacan speaks of a ‘fall’ into the symbolic network. Freud’s term for this process is *Nachträglichkeit* - “afterwardness” or retroactivity. In other domains, too, the production of a new work can potentially alter our understanding of all that has come before it retroactively.

In this way, the *meaning* of a narrative, whilst possessing its own integrity and autonomy, cannot be grasped outside the space of application. There is always a lot ‘at stake’ in any application or appropriation process; the transformation of a self or a context cannot be separated from the transformation of an entire history of effects. Hermeneutic appropriation

¹¹⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, 72.

¹²⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, 72.

¹²¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, 74-75. The other example, alongside psychoanalysis, is of a judge “unravelling the tangle of plots the subject is caught up in”.

always needs to be accompanied by a reflective understanding of the history of the work. This does not subtract from the appropriation process, it deepens it, since uncovering the history of effects is understanding better the foreignness/otherness of the work. With technologies, too, they at once contain innovative communication and situation-building strategies, but also a *history*. The development of solar power retroactively affects our understanding of coal. Returning to a typewriter in the age of digital computing is retroactively figured as an act of ‘nostalgia’.

Narratives, at the level of application, or ‘production’, maintain their dialectical character. They are distanced from the lifeworld in that they do not refer directly to a situation, but due to their ‘parasitic’ character they also play a crucial role in the lifeworld through the process of situation-building. The task of concretisation through application is ambiguous. It involves the active appropriation of a distanced or foreign world (the world of the text) on the part of the reader, but the text, too, is never wholly other. It is also a medium of communication. It belongs to the lifeworld in and through its distance from it. It is not only a series of material traces and operations, it also has a reflective aspect - it anticipates a reader or listener.

We will see in the following section that these features of narratives; integration, intelligibility, and production, also relate to the way technologies function in the lifeworld. They, like the work of emplotment, ‘gather together’ and integrate heterogeneous elements of practices and represent them in a more codified, structured mode. They are not only ‘rational’ structures, but also intelligible, requiring users and designers to follow a line of thought, to understand the overall aim or function, as well as the individual parts that, gathered together, work toward the realisation of this aim. Finally, they are also application-oriented. Whereas, it may seem at first that, unlike a narrative which invites multiple interpretations and revisions, technologies aim toward *direct*, unmediated (via a reader or user) application, technologies often possess the same communicative features of narrative. That is, application in the case of technology is often as uncertain and indeterminate as in the case of narratives. Technologies can be seen as inviting users to participate in a mutual process of concretization, with the user often having as much say in the outcome as the intended aim of the technologies themselves. Furthermore, engagement with technologies, as with narrative, always has the potential to retroactively affect our understanding of a particular technological design.

I have focused on the three above features of the narrative work, integration, intelligibility, and production, because they are all related to the ways that narrative affects practical understanding *at a distance*. The integrative force of narrative, caused by the demands of the

plot, arises from the desire to render time in a more presentable form. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, technologies aim to perform a similar operation, and this was seen by Simpson as a negative aspect of modern technology.

Yet, by drawing on features of narrative understanding, we can potentially re-read technologies in their practical, intelligible, and productive dimensions. The relationship between the narrative object (*mimesis*₂) and technological forms of configuration has already been productively explored by Mark Coeckelbergh and Wessel Reijers, as well as by Bruno Gransche in considering the *mimetic* character of computer simulations.¹²² These approaches emphasize the ways that technological configurations cannot be reduced to the linear, technological model of time that Simpson associates with modern technology. Instead, their structures more closely resemble the configurational form of emplotment, i.e., they are also teleological ordered and aimed to be *followed* or engaged with by human interlocutors. In this sense, they also contain traces of phenomenological or *lived* time inscribed within their structures.

For example, Coeckelbergh and Reijers stress that technological configuration involves both chronological and a-chronological aspects. The a-chronological aspects of narrative are what distinguish it from a mere description of a chain of events, since they work to relate individual parts of a narrative to the whole. For example, this is what allows for a ‘sense of an ending’ to emerge from overlapping series which, from a purely causal perspective, seem unrelated. Coeckelbergh and Reijers argue that technologies also contain an “a-chronological” sense of configuration, due to the necessary presence of a *user* or human interlocutor. For example,

when using a car a driver enters the car, puts his seat in the right position, adjusts the mirrors, starts the engine, is given visual feedback about the amount of gas in the tank, drives away from the parking spot. These events are implied in the way the technology is constructed and the way the human understands it, the car *configures* them. However, the sequence is not strictly chronological. Some events are determined in a chronological order, like starting the engine *before* driving away. In contrast, adjusting the seat of the mirrors can be done in many different orders; such events are organised according to an a-chronological dimension.¹²³

¹²² Mark Coeckelbergh and Wessel Reijers, “Narrative Technologies: A Philosophical Investigation of the Narrative Capacities of Technologies by Using Ricoeur’s Narrative Theory”, *Human Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016); Mark Coeckelbergh and Wessel Reijers, “The Blockchain as a Narrative Technology: Investigating the Social Ontology and Normative Configurations of Cryptocurrencies”, *Philosophy & Technology* (2016), 1-28; Bruno Gransche, “The Art of Staging Simulations: Mise-en-scène, Social Impact, and Simulation Literacy”, in *The Science and Art of Simulation 1* (Springer, 2017), 33-51.

¹²³ Coeckelbergh, “Narrative Technologies”, 336-337.

Ricoeur's understanding of narrative configuration provides a framework for interpreting technologies that encompasses both their constructed, artificial feature, and the *linguistic*, living aspects of these constructions. The linguistic, or narrative, features of technological configuration highlight the way that technologies are readable, or re-configurable, by the subjects engaging with them.

However, whereas these authors aim to develop a direct theory of technology through drawing parallels between *mimesis*₂ and technological devices and systems, in the following section I will focus on the relation between application, or *mimesis*₃, and technology. Just as the *meaning* of the narrative work is only disclosed through appropriation, I will focus on the meaning of technologies understood from this perspective.

Both Ricoeur's account of psychoanalytic technique and his outline of the narrative work stress the dangers of taking these phenomena 'in isolation'. Techniques, following Ricoeur, cannot be *objectified*, since their meaning depends on a dynamic process of application. Given that Ricoeur stresses the dangers of objectifying approaches that neglect the question of practical appropriation, it is unfortunate that he himself seemed to adopt an 'objectifying' account of modern technology. Technologies, as we will see in the next section also *integrate* and re-configure lived practical understandings. Just as *mimesis*₃ is integral to the narrative understood as a *work*, technological devices and interfaces depend on the configurational input of users in their practical applications. Although technologies *anticipate* or *intend* certain responses, in practice living engagements with technologies will potentially transform these anticipations.

SECTION 4: TECHNOLOGICAL APPLICATION

This following section charts the implications of Ricoeur's understanding of technique and distanciation for a consideration of technology. Although there may seem to be a divide between Ricoeur's notion of *technique*, as a practical method of clarification and unmasking, and the question of *technological* approaches to practice, I aim to demonstrate that technological applications retain many of the characteristics Ricoeur associates with technique. Although this approach, which reduces technology to the question of its *hermeneutic application*, misses out on key aspects of modern technology that would arise from a more encompassing viewpoint (for example, the Actor-Network Theory approach, a postphenomenological analysis, and so on), the aim of this section is not to present a definition of technology or its essential features, but rather to draw out its aspects that resonate with Ricoeur's productive account of technique, that is, its conflictual and revelatory characteristics that appear through its practical application. Nonetheless, in adopting this limited perspective, I hope to highlight both the essential limitations of technology (its constitutive dependence on interpretive engagements of interacting agents) as well as its transformative potential in relation to human understanding.

As was outlined in previous chapters, hermeneutic perspectives that emphasize the centrality of practical understanding tend to be critical of the *alienating* distance produced by modern technology. Whilst accepting this approach to the extent that it articulates an important and fundamental tension between the practical understanding of a self (*phronēsis*) and the types of knowledge gained through the distance of theory or method, I argue that these two fields of understanding, the practical and the evaluative, are integral to one another. For this reason, my discussions of contemporary technologies focus on thinkers who aim to draw on the productivity of the difference between technologies and human practical understanding.

Key technological phenomena, such as the device and the interface, can be analysed from a perspective of a hermeneutics of suspicion. Their logic or mode of representation is seen to be guided by an over-arching aim to render a functional, univocal reality. These features of technology, which are linked to how we define the purpose of technology (to make our lives easier, to solve certain problems more efficiently, and ultimately, to control the world and its variations), do indeed possess a certain *intentionality*. This intentionality or attitude which

guides technical progresses is, following Heidegger, related to a mode of comportment towards the world, the mode where the object is constituted as being present-at-hand.

Whereas, to a degree, the essence of technology is constituted through this mode of comportment, technological devices themselves, within the context of history and practice, more commonly display modes of *multistability*. To draw a parallel, if one of Ricoeur's main goals in developing his theory of textual distancing was to replace a "hermeneutics of the author" (a reconstructive project) with a hermeneutics of appropriation,¹ which placed emphasis on the *productive* and generative role of the reader/interpreting agent, then my goal here is to replace a focus on the "author" of technology (the designer, engineer, modern science, etc.) with a focus on the "user" of technology who renders a technology significant (or insignificant) according to the practical concerns of an individual, community, or tradition. The reasons why this shift in perspective is possible is due to (1) the multistability of the device, (2) the "unworkability" of the interface, and (3) the relational difference between technological ensembles and human understanding.

Chapter 5 and 6 will follow a similar format. They will begin with a critique of technology that draws on hermeneutic understandings of practice, which will then be followed by contrasting perspectives that highlight the practical and uncertain features of technological devices themselves. Chapter 5 begins with Albert Borgmann's argument that practices involve relations between agents and meaningful *things*. Modern technological *devices* on the other hand are distinct from things. They are designed in relation to a single purpose (providing comfort by making something more available), and therefore the *interpretive* features of things are negated, i.e., whereas things contain the possibility to be read and used in multiple ways depending on the practical concerns of human agents engaging with them (for example, the hearth of a home), devices can be reduced to a univocal, technological logic (for example, a radiator, whose purpose is to provide heat in the most 'invisible', unburdening way possible). In contrast, the work of Peter-Paul Verbeek argues that the practical hermeneutic feature of *things* – their power to mediate in fluid, variable ways – can also be associated with technological devices. Verbeek argues that by approaching devices from the perspective of how they *mediate* human action and understanding, rather than by their univocal intentionality,

¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Appropriation", in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

we can begin to design better devices that shape our moral environments in more productive ways.

In Chapter 6, I examine David Lewin's critique of the interface, which is similar to Borgmann's critique of the device. Both thinkers emphasize not only the way that these technological phenomena exclude the need for human deliberation and practice, but also the way that they conceal the alternative, i.e., in a world populated by devices and interfaces we no longer feel the desire to build a practical relationship with our environments or ourselves. Instead, we forgo the difficult praxis of self-creation and understanding because it seems difficult and uncertain in comparison to the "utopia of functionality" that the device and the interface offer us. However, this approach will also be contrasted with those of Alexander Galloway and Brenda Laurel, who, as I read them, allow us to shift the perspective from a focus on the *representational* features of technologies, towards their *presentational* features. For Galloway, the *aesthetic* dimension of the interface reveals its inconsistent and *unworkable* nature. For this reason, it ought to be understood more through its practical *effects* than its underpinning logic or over-arching purpose. For Laurel, the interface should be understood as a process of mediation, its purpose is to guide and support meaningful action in the world. As with a theatre production, there is a tension between the messages or themes being expressed and the performative features of the expression (set design, actors, the flow of the narrative, etc.). In the same way, human-computer interactions cannot be reduced to questions of *function* or utility. Instead, the interface places users at a hermeneutic distance from a direct understanding of the computer by inserting performative, dialogical features into the interaction.

The tensions explored in chapters 5 and 6, between definitions of what technologies *are* (their logic, how they conceal, etc.) and what technologies *do* (how they mediate practical action) will be explored further in chapter 7. As with Ricoeur's description of a *conflict of interpretations*, it seems that we are faced with two hermeneutic alternatives, either practice a hermeneutics of suspicion, aimed at unmasking technological modes of domination, or a (post)phenomenology of hope/faith, which would restrict itself to the revelatory qualities of technologies, i.e., their practical, mediational dimension, the aspect of technology which *addresses* me and calls me to act. Arguably, technologies have both an objective and a practical dimension. Their essence or logic, as the hermeneutic thinkers explored here suggest, progressively aims towards univocity, functionality and the elimination of the temporal flux of practice. However, their practical, living features also suggests a degree of variability and multistability when this logic is concretely applied to the lifeworld. Just as Ricoeur is critical of

approaches which tend towards abstraction, the hermeneutic critique of technologies tends to reduce it to only one side of its meaning (its logic). One way to think about a more productive relationship between the alterity of technology (in relation to practice) and the practical variability of concrete instances of technologies, is to assert the *limits* of a suspicion of technology. The work of Gilbert Simondon allows us to do this, since he argues that *technics* is always in a process of coming-to-be, i.e., its essence is not fixed or fully knowable. This enables us to see the meaning of technology, on the one hand, and the practical manifestations of technologies, on the other, not as polar opposites, but as two sides of the same process. Such an approach allows us to begin to talk about the possibility of a playful *appropriation* of technologies, which would retain both a critical distance and an engaged participation. Ricoeur's understanding of appropriation, linked to self-understanding, provides a framework for thinking about the hermeneutic circle between the self and technology. As a postphenomenological account suggests, practical engagements with technologies are required to unfold the different meanings and intentionalities of technological devices. However, hermeneutic appropriation adds to this the idea that, in drawing out the untried applications of technological designs, the practical *self* also becomes enlarged. Uncovering the untried possibilities of technologies implies the disclosing of future possibilities for practice and the types of selves who participate in those practices.

5. THE DEVICE

*A crucial feature of a technological device is that it makes something available to us in a comfortable way. You don't have to work for it. It's there at our beck and call.*²

*Every techne poses an intrinsic limit: its knowledge is not a full uncovering of something because the work it knows how to produce is delivered into the uncertainty of a use over which it does not preside.*³

The two above quotations represent a key tension that will be explored in this section. The first quote, taken from an interview with Albert Borgmann, reflects his criticism of the technological *device*. The device, in contrast to the focal thing, is dangerous because it discourages us from developing meaningful practices around it. It does 'work' on our behalf, but in doing so deprives us of valuable experiences that can only be gained by working-through a situation. Its supposed practicality, framed here in terms of the 'comfort' it provides us, actually ends up threatening our practical understanding of situations, therefore rendering the device an *impractical* artefact that conceals this nature through its functionality which appears as practical (albeit, a different, utilitarian sense of the practical). As with Simpson in the previous chapter, the comfort and availability of the device *alienates* us from the uncertainty of practice.

The second quote, by Gadamer, presents a similar division, but one which incorporates the broader sense of *techne*. For Gadamer, the inherent *uncertainties* of human practices can never be resolved through recourse to *techne* - there is always an ambiguity that persists between a concrete, practical formation and the formal rules and guidelines that mediate practices. The ambiguity can only be resolved by an act of interpretation or judgment, guided by *phronēsis*. That is, it is only a *self*, existing among a community of other selves, who is capable of at once perceiving the particularity of a concrete historical moment and the relevance (or irrelevance) of the formal rules that might apply to this moment. Although we learn a skill or *techne* to *apply* it in various contexts, the demands encountered within the contexts themselves will potentially escape the limits of the skill or knowledge we have learned, and therefore will involve a synthesis or mediation which acknowledges these limits. In other words, like the device, knowledge associated with *techne* can appear highly functional and useful, but within

² "Albert Borgmann on Taming Technology: An Interview", Religion Online, accessed January 7 2017, <http://www.religion-online.org/article/albert-borgmann-on-taming-technology-an-interview/>.

³ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1977), 201.

concrete contexts *uncertainties* persist which can only be resolved through *phronēsis*. *Techne*, from the perspective of practical wisdom, can appear entirely *impractical* due to its internal limitations and inability to anticipate uncertainty.

For Borgmann, to overcome the hermeneutic impracticality of the device we must begin to cultivate alternative human practices which embrace the notion of the *focal thing*. That is, through purposeful and communal action we can reconstitute (re-territorialize) our practical environments as spaces of meaningful, uncertain relations between persons and things. However, in the second part of the chapter the work of Peter-Paul Verbeek is explored in order to ask whether this person-thing, practice-based ontology is the only way to approach the ‘limits’ of technological devices. According to postphenomenology, technologies themselves, in their multistability, present their own set of uncertainties requiring practical negotiation. From this perspective it is possible to challenge the notion that there is a fundamental division between *phronēsis* and *techne*. That is, we ought to ask whether practices are only constituted through the activity of human, interpretive agents (capable of practical wisdom), or whether practical self-understanding can also be seen as a product of *techne*. This perspective is advocated by Foucault and Pierre Hadot, for example, where the idea of *technology* is combined with the idea of a *self*.⁴ Selfhood, on this account, is always linked to the external skills and techniques we learn throughout life. Once this constitutive role of external techniques is recognized, we can begin the task of designing *better*, more moral, techniques of the self. This view of practice, which aims to encompass both the activities of agents and the devices and artefacts that mediate and even enable these activities, is more closely related to Ricoeur’s account of practical understanding as involving both distancing and belonging, i.e., we do not only belong to a milieu through our practical relations with things and others, we are also always already *distanced* from it. A hermeneutics of distancing suggests that stepping away from a practice, in order to analyse or examine its features, can also draw us closer to it. It accepts the fact that, as Ricoeur writes, every proximity or relation of belonging is already mediated by a “secret” distance.⁵ The work of Verbeek draws on a similar view of practice and

⁴ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵ “And if we had never drawn near to the country of the unsayable, would we ever understand the meaning of the secret, of the untranslatable secret? And do not our best exchanges, in love and friendship, preserve this quality of discretion – of secrecy and discretion – that preserves distance in proximity?” Paul Ricoeur, “The Paradigm of Translation,” in *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 120.

emphasizes the role that *technologies* play in everyday modes of practical mediation. Recognizing this feature of practice, the interrelationship between distance and belonging, allows Verbeek to develop an ethics of design.

5.1 THINGS AND DEVICES

For Borgmann, in a similar sense to Simpson in the previous chapter, our traditional senses of practice are in danger of being overturned by modern technology. In particular, practice as a way of developing *focus* is threatened by modern technology. Once again, it is not necessarily technology or *techne* in-itself that is being questioned, but the “tightly patterned character” of a society dominated by technology. Indeed, techniques have always accompanied human life, but when technology becomes more effective and general, it transforms our relation to it in a negative way. Borgmann argues that the greatest danger posed by technology is that we become ‘alienated’ from our practices. The comfort of the device renders practical being-in-the-world a ‘burden’ in contrast, an approach that is similar to Simpsons (we are alienated from practices),

As long as we overlook the tightly patterned character of technology and believe that we live in a world of endlessly open and rich opportunities, as long as we ignore the definite ways that we, acting technologically, have worked out the promise of technology and remain vaguely enthralled by that promise, so long simple things and practices will seem burdensome, confining and drab. But if we recognise the central vacuity of advanced technology, that emptiness can become the opening for focal things. It works both ways, of course. When we see a focal concern of ours threatened by technology, our sight for the liabilities of mature technology is sharpened.⁶

Focal concerns require time to develop. The ‘promise’ of technology, which appears infinite, perpetually distracts us from the time of the present. Why take the time to develop a meaningful, focused relation with a milieu, when the milieu is constantly being transformed and updated by technological innovation? Even if we were to consider that there are many reasons why doing so might be beneficial, we are persuaded by the rationality perpetuated by the “tightly patterned” technological network of devices that affects our worldview and makes focused practice seem ‘obsolete’ or irrational.

⁶ Albert Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, in Robert C. Scharff and Val Duesk (eds.) *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition: An Anthology* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 331.

Borgmann utilizes hermeneutic understandings of practice and *praxis* to develop a critical account of modern technology. What is at stake is the practical relation between persons and things. In the case of the technological device, the person is no longer a part of the relation - the device does all the work, is pre-programed to disclose certain features, contains its own promise, and so on. In the case of the 'thing' as a feature of practice, on the other hand, the relation between humans and objects becomes crucial. Things are transformed from utilitarian devices into 'focal things'. It is practice, with all its associated features - the motivations and actions of an agent, the indeterminate flux of time, patterns of meaningful, differentiating repetition - that enables the thing to 'thing' (emanate), in Heidegger's sense of the term.⁷ Truths are revealed that are the product of interlocking phenomena - subject, environment, qualities of the thing - rather than the rational, 'comforting' truths of the device. In short, "what must be shown is that focal things can prosper in human practices only."⁸ Devices that alienate us and eschew practical understanding can find no place to flourish.

As with Ricoeur's distinction between the univocity of the sign and the equivocity of the symbol, the device is distinct from the thing due to its singular or specialized functionality. Whereas signs tend towards abstraction, symbolic meaning is *bound* to a context or interpretation. For Borgmann, the thing is bound in a similar sense,

A thing, in the sense in which I want to use the word here, is inseparable from its context, namely, its world, and from our commerce with the thing and its world, namely, engagement. The experience of a thing is always and also a bodily and social engagement with the thing's world. In calling forth a manifold engagement, a thing necessarily provides more than one commodity.⁹

Whereas a thing will contain multiple, and even ambiguous, meanings depending on contextual and interpretive factors, devices tend toward a logic of *availability*. That is, over the course of many historical iterations, devices work to make a single function more and more available to the user. Rendering a *single* function accessible entails concealing the corresponding functions that are needed to produce it (the machinery of the device for example). The ubiquity and ease of obtaining warmth in industrial societies is a product of this technological tendency, "We get a first glimpse of the distinctiveness of availability when we remind ourselves that warmth was

⁷ Martin Heidegger. "The Thing", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 161-185.

⁸ Borgmann, "Focal Things and Practices", 332.

⁹ Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).41.

not available, e.g., in Montana a hundred years ago.”¹⁰ In this time, warmth was neither “instantaneous, ubiquitous, safe, [nor] easy”.¹¹ As different technological solutions progress, the various *means* of achieving the goal of making heat more available recede, and what remains is a single, univocal function, “The wood-burning stove yields to the coal-fired central plant with heat distribution by convection, which in turn gives way to a plant fuelled by natural gas and heating through forced air, and so on.”¹² In contrast, the stove or hearth is considered a proper *thing*, since it contains multiple functions which are unfolded by the actors engaging with the thing,

Thus a stove used to furnish more than mere *warmth*. It was a *focus*, a hearth, a place that gathered the work and leisure of a family and gave the house a centre. Its coldness marked the morning, and the spreading of its warmth the beginning of the day. It assigned to the different family members tasks that defined their place in the household. The mother built the fire, the children kept the firebox filled, and the father cut the firewood. It provided for the entire family a regular and bodily engagement with the rhythm of the seasons that was woven together of the threat of cold and the solace of warmth, the smell of wood smoke, the exertion of sawing and of carrying, the teaching of skills, and the fidelity to daily tasks.¹³

The hearth, due to this ordering and revealing power, is a *focal* thing. The idea of a focal thing is appropriated from Heidegger. It is something that “gathers the relations of its context and radiates into its surroundings and informs them.”¹⁴ Borgmann points out that the Latin word *focus* means hearth, and he takes the example of the fireplace as paradigmatic of pretechnological modes of focus, “the fireplace constituted a centre of warmth, of light, and of daily practices.”¹⁵ In contrast, the device paradigm is represented by the heating plant; decentralized and foreboding.

Importantly, the device is constituted through the *promise* of technology.¹⁶ The promise of technology is found in the criteria of availability mentioned above, and in order for this promise to succeed, the means of obtaining the promise must be concealed, since they are difficult, uncertain, burdensome and un-available, “A device such as a central heating plant procures mere warmth and disburdens us of all other elements. These are taken over by the machinery

¹⁰ Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 41.

¹¹ The criteria Borgmann associates with availability.

¹² Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 41.

¹³ Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 41-42.

¹⁴ Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, 330.

¹⁵ Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, 329.

¹⁶ Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 35-40.

of the device. The machinery makes no demands on our skill, strength, or attention.”¹⁷ Therefore the device, no matter how complex, can be reduced to its univocal purpose of making its function more available, and indeed all industrial technologies can be reduced to the same process or tendency, resulting in a technological *pattern* that persists across heterogeneous artefacts.

Both Borgmann and Ricoeur’s comments on technologies and technological rationality, suggest that all devices and technological systems manifest the same, univocal essence. Generating more forms of technologies, or finding new ways to apply existing technologies would not advance or subtract from this essence, it would simply count as “identical” repetitions of the same that would contrast with the “non-identical” repetitions of practice and practical understanding. For example, Catherine Pickstock discusses the logic of identical repetition in a way that corresponds to the proliferation of many commercial forms of technology. Things that repeat identically proceed “via an accumulation of differences, united by their identity as expressing a univocal being in a successive orientation, and by the asyndetic successivity itself.”¹⁸ Whereas, what Borgmann calls *focal things* are the foundation for practices, a practical relation with devices that repeat identically is more akin to a Sisyphean struggle, since the things or devices themselves have no inherent meaning and therefore,

none of them would be more than itself, rich with a plenitude of significance to which neither they nor we are equal, yet the more themselves for that very reason, and so the better to guide us. Instead, they could only be moved about, or swapped one for the other in an attempt to relieve tedium, a process which Kierkegaard described as the ‘rotation of crops’.¹⁹

To avoid the nihilistic ‘rotation of crops’ implied by forms of action corresponding to the device paradigm, Borgmann argues that our response should lie in a rehabilitation of social practices, a resoluteness and focused awareness of things, “The turn to things cannot be a setting aside and even less an escape from technology but a kind of affirmation of it.”²⁰ Focal activity involves a “vow” or commitment to the power of human action, i.e., it involves developing a new way of social life.²¹ For Borgmann, “the peril of technology lies not in this

¹⁷ Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 42.

¹⁸ Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity: The Literary Agenda* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 151.

¹⁹ Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity*, 152.

²⁰ Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, 331.

²¹ Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, 337.

or that of its manifestations but *in the pervasiveness and consistency of its pattern*,’’²² and because of this, “technology must be countered by an equally patterned and social commitment, i.e., by a practice.”²³

However, as I have been discussing so far, *practical understanding*, following Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, incorporates both distancing and belonging. In Ricoeur’s sense, a focal thing would also be an *appropriated* thing, its focal characteristics might not only be due to human practice, but also to internal features of its design. There would always be aspects of the thing that transcend our practical engagement and demand a critical evaluation. The question is, does this critical, distanced reflection on the thing disrupt our focus of it? As we have seen, the disruption of distancing is also the condition for a renewed belonging. If we see technological devices as the product of a distanced perspective on a practice, then we can begin to trace the ways that they are reflective of practice. As explored in Chapter 1, David Kaplan has argued that hermeneutics needs to go beyond the transcendental approach to technology (in this case an analysis of its tightly patterned character) and embrace the empirical turn in the philosophy of technology. Meaning is not only a product of practical comportment, but also of material relations between things and technological configurations. In relation to *phronēsis*, a crucial feature of practice that will be discussed below, Kaplan discusses the idea of ‘tact’ in a situation. Tact is a skill learned through experience, and something which may be instructed by technologies, which often provide practical solutions to problems,

This connection between tact and practical wisdom has completely dropped out of the contemporary conversation of technology. But what is largely at issue in questions concerning the good life in a technological age is the notion of appropriateness of conduct. Technology is shot through with tact. It answers key questions such as how things ought to be designed, how they should be used, how they should affect others, how they should be governed.²⁴

In other words, the immanent features of devices themselves contain an ‘ought’, both in terms of their design and how they suggest certain uses. The question is whether this ought is straight-forward and univocal, or whether it genuinely addresses a subject and provokes meaningful engagement. Since Borgmann correctly points out that the more *functional* and

²² Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, 336.

²³ Borgmann, “Focal Things and Practices”, 336.

²⁴ David Kaplan, “Thing Hermeneutics”, in *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics*, eds. Francis J. Mootz III and George H. Taylor (New York and London: Continuum, 2011), 232.

comfortable a device is the more it recedes from view and negates engagement, the task is to discover ways that the device is also *dysfunctional* and provokes a practical response.

As I have argued in previous sections with regard to hermeneutic application and appropriation, *unstable* features of practice are also essential in our understandings of meaning. Practical understanding also involves broken vows and disturbed focus. Discourse, case-histories, and narratives are all fragile worlds whose shape is determined as much by how they are appropriated as by their own, internal, rational structures. However, what I have also tried to show is the productivity of technique, which is always also distinct from singular practical scenarios. An aspect of this productivity is the *alterity* implied by the distance of technique, a distance which makes application a *process* or struggle, rather than an unmediated grasping of meaning. In this sense, focus is powerful, when held, because it is always *threatened by disruption*. This threat is an aspect of the nature of focus and the ‘present’ of practice, and is what makes appropriation a *task* rather than something immediately given. The *truth* of practice is given as much by the device that draws us away from it, as the focal thing that we are already related meaningfully to.

For Ricoeur, who emphasises the inescapable fact of mediation and condition of the ‘shattered cogito’, it might be more appropriate to speak of the *refracted focus* of practices and things. The thing that is fully in focus is held in that place by the ‘distractions’ kept out of focus. For this reason, Ricoeur criticises Heidegger’s ‘direct’ ontology, revealed in this case by the focal thing emanating, and suggests instead an ‘indirect’ ontology. In order to understand the focal thing it is necessary, also, to explain, from a distance, those features that are ‘unfocused’ or on the margins. To clarify the structures and frames which are mediating our focus and ‘belonging’ without us being aware of it. A reflective engagement with the workings of devices, as Kaplan suggests, can reveal their *practical* value beyond the impracticality that appears through a consideration of their function or ‘promise’.

Peter-Paul Verbeek argues that Borgmann achieves a significant departure from Heidegger in that his analysis of devices and the way they shape human behaviour and action counts as a more concrete account of technology. However, whereas Borgmann predominately focuses on the negative consequences of the device paradigm, Verbeek aims to articulate the *productive* capacities of the device,

Borgmann’s conclusion that only nontechnological things have the ability to engage human beings and that technological artifacts only invite disengaged consumption, however, is too hasty, as I shall shortly show. He focuses too narrowly on the forms of

engagement that technology discourages or renders impossible, while ignoring that devices can indeed promote engagement as well.²⁵

In the second part of this chapter I explore Verbeek's alternative account of the 'device', in order to examine how devices can also "promote engagement". Verbeek aims to draw out the *thingly* character of technological artefacts. He utilizes an example of what we could call a focal *device* - a ceramic heater design by the collective Eternally Yours. This device, a product of modern technology, plays on the exact features of practice that Borgmann is advocating. Rather than designing a heater that would be 'invisible', a Dutch design collective created a heater that would have to be placed in the *centre* of the room and require engagement. They recreate the 'focal thing', the hearth, in the figure of the device, and in doing so, bring what was once at the margin into focus. This, I argue, should be the critical approach of a practice-oriented philosophy in relation to technology – not pushing modern technology further away from the sphere of practice and focus, but bringing it into direct confrontation with practice, to see if practical engagement will have anything productive to say.

5.2 UNCERTAIN APPLICATIONS

Here, I aim to examine the question of the limits of *technē*, gestured towards by the opening Gadamer quote, by focusing on the ways in which uncertainty and wisdom relate to each other in practical settings.²⁶ The work of Aristotle, which never ceases to be a source of philosophical reflection and innovation (virtue ethics, virtue epistemology, etc.), will provide the background for this part of the discussion. The fields of technology and postphenomenology lend themselves especially well to an Aristotelian understanding of ethics. In particular, this subsection will argue that the intellectual virtues of *technē* and *phronēsis* as described by Aristotle feature prominently in Peter-Paul Verbeek's postphenomenological approach to technological mediation and morality. I will argue that Verbeek's work aids in collapsing distinctions between these virtues, with the result that our practical and ethical deliberations about technologies can be reconceived in a more productive way. However, I will also point to

²⁵ Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 178.

²⁶ Material from this subsection initially appeared in: Eoin Carney, "Knowing Ignorance: The Fragility of Technological Application", In *Technisches Nichtwissen*, eds. Alexander Friedrich, Petra Gehring, Christoph Hubig, Andreas Kaminski, and Alfred Nordmann (Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2016) 41-54.

the limits of this approach by drawing on Ricoeur's link between practical wisdom and tragic wisdom.

Aristotle's distinction between the practice-based virtues of *techne* and *phronēsis* suggests that in processes of application there are two types of 'skill' at work. On the one hand, there is the know-how associated with *techne*, knowledge relating to how technologies work or operate. On the other hand, there is the *wisdom* associated with application. It is not enough to simply understand the operations or design of technologies; we must also have a sense of the horizon or context in which these technologies may function. In this way, the two fields of application, designated in this section through the virtues of *techne* and *phronēsis*, could be delineated by the skills associated with knowing *how* (*techne*) and knowing *when* (practical wisdom). Furthermore, whereas *techne* pertains to operations knowledge, *phronēsis* is linked to orientations knowledge. The strength of Verbeek's work, I argue, lies in the way that it draws out the interrelationship between these two types of skills and knowledge sets. For Verbeek, understanding what technological mediation *does*, in a practical sense, means understanding both how (moral) subjects are shaped by technologies, and also how technologies themselves work and are shaped in relation to interpreting and acting subjects. He brings to the foreground the productivity of the tension associated with application, taken in its hermeneutic sense, and demonstrates how this tension can be put to work in relation to our moral self-understanding.

However, this differentiation between knowing *how* and knowing *when* also leads to a recognition of a fundamental incommensurability between the two types of skills. There is always a 'technical ignorance' that no amount of wisdom can overcome. Similarly, practical wisdom is challenged by shifting contexts and horizons due to new developments in technologies and technical knowledge. Because of the conflictual and often asymmetric nature of these two types of practical skills, there persists what Ricoeur calls the "tragedy of action" in all practical life.

With these points in mind, this part of the chapter is divided into two subsections. The first (1) examines the ways that wisdom and technologies complement and presuppose one another in practical settings, while the second (2) provides further reflections on this approach by drawing a link between *deinon* and *phronēsis*. I argue that, although Verbeek's account of technological mediation succeeds in reconciling the types of skills associated with design and *techne* with the moral insight associated with practical wisdom, his approach does not go far enough. Against the backdrop of a post-phenomenological understanding of technologies it is important also to recognise the inherent tension or *fault* at the heart of practical life and application, a

fault which cannot be simply overcome through wisdom, but rather persists due to the incommensurability between wisdom and technologies.

5.2.1 DESIGNING WITH CONVICTION

For Gadamer, whose subject in *Truth and Method* is hermeneutical consciousness, both *techne* and *phronēsis* appear at first sight as analogous in relation to the central hermeneutic problem of *application*. Gadamer notes the initial difficulty of distinguishing between *phronēsis* and *techne* from an ontological perspective, “if, with Aristotle, we define the ‘object’ of this knowledge ontologically not as something general that always is as it is, but as something individual that can also be different.”²⁷ Both are categorised as types of knowledge, yet knowledge that cannot be dissociated from experience. Even in cases where one has a prior knowledge of a craft or moral system (for example), the task of application will remain as open in each new case. Therefore, increased instruction, or even increased levels of experience, will never fully solve the problems of application.

However, although both intellectual virtues deal with variable subject matter and questions of application, Gadamer also identifies three primary tensions between the two concepts. Firstly, “We learn a *techne* and can also forget it. But we do not learn moral knowledge, nor can we forget it. We do not stand over against it, as if it were something that we can acquire or not, as we can choose to acquire an objective skill, a *techne*.”²⁸ So the problem of applying moral knowledge is more ambiguous, since application implies that the knowledge is somehow already possessed or learned before the application process. Whereas *techne* is largely concerned with *direct* application, practical wisdom arises due to the incommensurability between the general, “perfect” system of rules or laws, and the singular practical situations which appear imperfect or *exceptional* in light of these laws.

Secondly, *phronēsis* always includes a component of *self*-deliberation, and therefore it is a type of knowledge that is always bound to the experience of a moral subject. The “seeing” associated with practical wisdom is not necessarily a seeing of what is right or wrong, but a seeing of oneself and the relevance of one’s own life experience. The opposite of a wise or “correct” judgement is not a false judgement or a judgement made in “error,” but rather a *blind*

²⁷ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donal G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 314.

²⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 315.

judgement. In the case of *techne*, by contrast, a failed application can be put down to error or incomplete knowledge. When assigning responsibility or a cause to practical errors, we say that a poor judgement is the result of inexperience, a passionate disposition, blindness, and so on, whereas a poor product which results from a craft can either be the result of an inexperienced maker *or* a faulty or incomplete *method*. There is no analogous objective correlate in the case of practical wisdom: “It is pointless here to distinguish between knowledge and experience, as can be done in the case of a *techne*. For moral knowledge contains a kind of experience in itself . . . compared with which all other experience represents an alienation, not to say a denaturing.”²⁹

The third key distinction Gadamer makes between *techne* and *phronēsis* is in relation to the phenomena of terror and forgiveness/empathy. I will return to this distinction in the following section on *deinon phronēsis*. Here, I challenge the first two divisions Gadamer makes between *techne* and *phronēsis*, the directness of technical application and the type of moral self suggested by *phronēsis*, with reference to Peter-Paul Verbeek’s alternate understanding of technological mediation. Technological applications, according to Verbeek, are neither direct, nor unrelated to questions of the moral self. There is a fundamental uncertainty associated with self-knowledge and interpretation, an uncertainty which seems to be in contrast with the types of knowledge associated with *techne*, which can be learned, transmitted, improved on, applied directly, and so on. However, a postphenomenological analysis of technologies aims to bring to the fore the *uncertainties* immanent in the act of producing and designing things. This uncertainty is drawn on in order to demonstrate the ways in which design and morality are intertwined.

Although Verbeek does not discuss *phronēsis* thematically, there is arguably some overlap between his understanding of morality and the concept of practical wisdom as it has been used in recent literature (on the role of *phronēsis* in the social sciences³⁰ and in professional practice.³¹) One of the clearest reference points for Verbeek’s use of the term “morality” is found in the later work of Michel Foucault, and from this we can see that Verbeek is relying on a very specific, practice-based, and critical understanding of morality. The central parallel

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 319.

³⁰ Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*, trans. Steven Sampson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Bent Flyvbjerg, Todd Landman, and Sanford Schram, eds., *Real Social Science: Applied Phronesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

³¹ Elizabeth Anne Kinsella and Allan Pitman, eds., *Phronesis as Professional Knowledge: Practical Wisdom in the Professions* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2012).

between the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom and Verbeek's attempt to conceive the relation between technology and morality is found in the rejection of episteme as the privileged form of knowledge for discerning "truth," especially moral truths. Foucault's work on *technologies of the self*³² aims to demonstrate what could be termed the "impersonal" or "unconcerned" dimension of episteme. The imperative associated with the truth of episteme is summed up in the command *know thyself*, a command which Foucault argues was classically circumscribed by the imperative to *care for oneself*, a nesting of theoretical knowledge which has been forgotten with the modern dominance of the natural sciences and their corresponding methods.³³

Following Foucault, Verbeek argues that what is called for in a moral consideration of technology, seen as a practical and inevitable form of mediating reality, is giving closer attention to the role of technology in practices, and to the way that it shapes or *forms* our everyday moral selves and contexts. He rejects approaches that advocate a distanced ethical evaluation of technology in-itself, for example in relation to its essence or to human nature. The model of morality under investigation is a form of *ascesis*,

Technological *ascesis* . . . consists in *using* technology, but in a deliberate and responsible way, such that the "self" that results from it – including its relations to other people – acquires a deliberate shape. Not the moral acceptability, then, is central in ethical reflection on technology use, but the quality of the *practices* that result from it, and the *subjects* that are constituted in it.³⁴

For the purposes of this chapter, I assume an affinity between the above understanding of technological ascesis and practical wisdom. This relation would need to be explored further, but the fruits of such a linking have already been demonstrated in Flyvbjerg's work on *phronēsis* and the social sciences: "Foucault is the genealogist of the variable *par excellence*; his works are elaborate exercises in making that which appears invariable variable. . . . It would, perhaps, be an overstatement to say that Foucault's ethics *is phronēsis*, but there is certainly more than a faint similarity between Aristotelian *phronēsis* and Foucauldian ethics."³⁵

Appropriately, Verbeek chooses the practice of *design* to investigate the relation between technology and morality in practical settings. In contrast to a 'technician', a 'designer's'

³² Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*; Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*.

³³ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 4.

³⁴ Peter-Paul Verbeek, "Obstetric Ultrasound and the Technological Mediation of Morality: A Postphenomenological Analysis," *Human Studies* 31:1 (2008), 23.

³⁵ Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, 112.

concern is not solely with functionality but rather with the overall experience produced through technologies. Designer-knowledge is in some ways closer to *techne* in the sense of an art, craft, or technique, rather than in the sense of a specialist type of knowledge relating to the functioning of technical systems. A designer must nevertheless engage with and be somewhat proficient in the types of technical knowledge associated with the practice they are trying to shape.

It is because of the plurality of contexts and settings in which technologies are deployed that a more complex picture of design has to be developed. This fundamental ambiguity of technical knowledge in relation to its applications is described well by Don Ihde's term *multistability*: "a technology can have several stabilities, depending on the way it is embedded in a use context."³⁶ This description of technologies points to their *interpretive* aspects; their intended use, or "intentionality," might at first appear univocal or deterministic in terms of the ways that they shape action, but within the history of technology we can see that there is also an openness in technological devices. Ihde uses the classic examples of the telephone and typewriter, which "were not developed as communication and writing technologies but as equipment for the blind and the hard of hearing to help those individuals hear and write. In their use contexts, they were interpreted quite differently, however."³⁷

This ambiguous or multistable aspect of technological design/intentionality means that the role of interpretation becomes more relevant in considering the practical use value of technology. Designers are responsible not only for considering the intended use of their products, but also the complexity and diversity of interpretive possibilities and stances adopted by the human agents engaging with technologies in practical settings. In a sense, designers must also possess a type of practical wisdom, a virtue which deals with deliberation about *human* action and its ends, and the things which *pertain to* those ends: "Technologies help to shape what counts as 'real'. This hermeneutic role of things has important ethical consequences since it implies that technologies can actively contribute to the moral decisions human beings make."³⁸

The ethical task for designers does not consist in making their own devices or systems more robust or closed off to unintended uses through strengthening their technical knowledge. Rather their responsibility stems from broader concerns based on an insight that the interpretability of

³⁶ Peter-Paul Verbeek, "Materializing Morality: Design Ethics and Technological Mediation," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 31:3 (2006), 365.

³⁷ Verbeek, "Materializing Morality," 365.

³⁸ Verbeek, "Materializing Morality," 366.

devices can become a positive factor in the shaping of the moral lives of the users. The “moral” work of the designer is then to bridge the gap between design context and possible use contexts:

To cope with this complexity, designers should try to establish a connection between the context of design and the context of use. Designers could try to formulate product specifications not only on the basis of the desired functionality of the product but also on the basis of an informed prediction of its future mediating role and a moral assessment of this role.³⁹

Crucial here is the importance of developing an *informed prediction* of the device’s future mediating role. Enriching the informed decision requires not only a development of the technical knowledge needed in the design context, but also a practical and imaginative understanding of how designs are deployed in the field of human action. There is a clear division between the technical task of striving for functionality and the moral assessment of the device as it may exist in various contexts, with the latter being emphasized by Verbeek. Verbeek provides an example of this broader understanding of design in the case of the Dutch industrial designers collective Eternally Yours. This company aims to address issues of sustainability, not only by considering the usual, calculative questions of “reducing pollution in production, consumption and waste,”⁴⁰ but also by considering a deeper problem of sustainability which is found in the relation between humans and artefacts:

the actual problem, Eternally Yours holds, is that most of our products are thrown away far before actually being worn out...For this reason, Eternally Yours focuses on developing ways to create product longevity. It does so by investigating how the coming about of attachment between products and their users could be stimulated and enhanced.⁴¹

Most technologies are designed to need as little maintenance or attention as possible, and strive towards the production of what David Lewin calls “utopias of functionality” (Chapter 6). This is especially clear in the design logic of interfaces, which Lewin discusses in relation to *phronēsis*:

The whole point of the interface is to stabilize what discloses itself. We might say that it fixes and closes, and thereby opposes disclosure. By its attempt to conceal complex

³⁹ Verbeek, “Materializing Morality,” 372.

⁴⁰ Verbeek, “Materializing Morality,” 373.

⁴¹ Verbeek, “Materializing Morality,” 373.

(that is, fragile or insecure) interaction and deliberation, the interface denigrates and excludes the human faculty of practical reason, named by Aristotle as *phronēsis*.⁴²

For Verbeek, too, the aim of functionality in relation to technological design is not always the most practical. We are indeed “disburdened” through these efficient designs: “Technologies, after all, are often designed to disburden people: a central heating system liberates us from the necessity to gather wood, chop it, fill the hearth, clean it, and so forth. We need only to switch a button and our house gets warm.”⁴³ But this disburdening also leads to carelessness in our attitude towards our practical environments. To counter this process, we do not necessarily need to minimize or even eradicate the presence of technologies in our practical lives, but rather we can re-imagine the role that technology can play, supplementing our technical capability to produce highly “functional” systems with a practical wisdom which better understands and anticipates the more complex field of human action. For example, in relation to the problem of heating, we need not necessarily return to the valuable work of gathering wood, chopping it, and so on; instead we can simply pay more attention to the way we interact with technologies:

An interesting example in this direction is an engaging electric/ceramic heater that was designed by Sven Adolph... This artifact is not a purely functional heater that withdraws into pure functionality like common radiators, which are hidden under the windowsill and are only turned on and off. It is an engaging product that asks for attention and involvement in its functioning, much like a campfire. You cannot hide it under the windowsill but have to put it in the middle of the room. You cannot escape it if you need warmth: you have to sit around it. Its shells have to be arranged if you want it to function. Simply turning the heater on and off is not enough: you actually have to be involved in its functioning if you want it to work.⁴⁴

In this way, designers are able to free themselves from anxieties about the limits of their technical knowledge, that is, uncertainty with regard to the functioning of devices in practical settings whose complexities cannot always be anticipated by a narrow “technical” approach. By adopting the view that technologies help *mediate* our understanding of the world, designers learn better how to contribute to our practical self-understanding and our moral relations with others. Technical knowledge and practical wisdom combine in order to anticipate this mediating process more completely.

⁴² David Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology,” in *From Ricoeur to Action: The Socio-Political Significance of Ricoeur’s Thinking*, eds. Todd S. Mei and David Lewin (Bloomsbury: London and New York, 2012), 65.

⁴³ Verbeek, “Materializing Morality,” 374.

⁴⁴ Verbeek, “Materializing Morality,” 374.

Verbeek's overall understanding of technology demonstrates how problems arising from the *limits* of technical knowledge can be bridged, precisely by extending the types of questions that *techne* poses toward those which practical wisdom aims to address, namely, the ambiguity of application and the formation of the moral self. This approach intertwines agency and mediation in practical understanding. Moral decisions cannot be made solely based on the insight of an independent or distanced human mind. Instead, they must be deliberative, due to the variable nature of singular practical settings and the multistabilities of the devices that mediate our action in these settings. I have argued that the type of morality suggested by this description is similar to the virtue-based practical wisdom described by Aristotle.

However, in the following section a caveat is added to this relatively smooth or frictionless picture of technological mediation and its associated practical moral philosophy. I argue that an understanding of practical wisdom that sees it as a way of enriching or complementing technical knowledge (understandings which aim to produce a more holistic or "spiritual" description of practice⁴⁵) neglects an important factor. The missing factor is the *tragedy* of action, an aspect of practical life which is incorporated into the hermeneutic philosophies of Ricoeur and Gadamer. It is notable that, in their most extensive discussions of *phronēsis*, both Ricoeur and Gadamer make sure to include the important link between *phronēsis* and *deinon* in their analysis.

5.2.2 DEINON PHRONĒSIS

In the above account of technological mediation, the crucial aspect of the *ambiguity* of technologies was brought to the fore. On the one hand, this aspect is celebrated as allowing the design process to become a consideration of making the 'best' and most moral technologies possible within a given set of circumstances. The systems produced need not be perfect nor totally determined in advance, and allow for the preservation of the freedom of the users, on the condition that this freedom is understood as a relative freedom which is always mediated by social, political, and technological circumstances. The other side of this ambiguity is a recognition of the *fault* of technologies. Technologies will always under-perform, or perform in ways not immediately anticipated by designers. It seems, therefore, that we transition from

⁴⁵ "We will call 'spirituality' then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subjects very being, for the price to be paid for access to the truth." Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 15.

faulty technical knowledge to a complementary wisdom which *completes* the action mediated by technologies and reorients them in a direction guided by moral insight.

However, this transition can also be conceived of in another way. Recognition of a fault or ambiguity does not always result in a correction of the fault; it can also lead to an acceptance of incompleteness and vulnerability. This latter approach to ambiguity is central to one of the key paradoxes of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is, on the one hand, concerned with bringing about understanding, but on the other hand, it views understanding as something which constantly escapes us and remains incomplete. Even if we accept Verbeek's postphenomenological analysis of technologies, we do not need to see the incompleteness of technical knowledge solely as a practical, pragmatic problem, demanding a solution or judgement which would bring a sense of unity or concreteness to technical knowledge. Instead, we can view the fault of technologies as a symbol which gives rise to reflection, but remains a problem that cannot be overcome:

Phronēsis, often seen as the pragmatic virtue combining sight and insight enabling a moral agent to judge and act rightly in a given situation becomes, when touched by tragedy in all its senses, a *deinon phronēsis*. *Deinon phronēsis* sees situations demanding choice against the background of *fault* – a phenomenon capable of symbolisation and narration but resistant to understanding – aware that some situations embody *aporiai*; mutually exclusive principles or norms. An *aporia* is not resolved by action; it is lived through.⁴⁶

In Ricoeur's ethics, found in *Oneself as Another*⁴⁷, the strategic role of his "interlude," a reading of *Antigone*, is not to outline a practical moral philosophy founded on *phronēsis*, but rather to demonstrate the necessity of *phronēsis* in an approach that combines an ethical wish to live well and in accordance with one's desire with moral respect for others and their conflicting desires. *Phronēsis* emerges against the background of tragic conflict as a mode of interpreting conflict justly. The wisdom *Antigone* provokes is a wisdom that has been exposed to the horrors of ethical conflict, conflict which emerges from the persistence of exceptions and singular situations in political life. Thus understood, wisdom is not a way of overcoming failures or faults of mediation, but of becoming aware of and experiencing the persistence of these faults in a humane way:

⁴⁶ David Fisher, "Ricoeur's *Atemwende*: A Reading of 'Interlude: Tragic Action' in *Oneself as Another*," in *From Ricoeur to Action: The Socio-Political Significance of Ricoeur's Thinking*, ed. Todd S. Mei and David Lewin (London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2012), 195.

⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 169-296.

The fiction forged by the poet is one of conflicts which Steiner rightly considers intractable, nonnegotiable. Taken as such, tragedy produces an ethicopractical aporia. . . . In this respect, one of the functions of tragedy in relation to ethics is to create a gap between tragic wisdom and practical wisdom. By refusing to contribute a “solution” to the conflicts made insoluble by fiction, tragedy, after having disoriented the gaze, condemns the person of praxis to reorient action, at his or her own risk, in the sense of a practical wisdom in situation that best *responds* to tragic wisdom.⁴⁸

This view of practical wisdom suggests an alternate moral function to a view which may see wisdom as a deeper or more insightful way of perceiving a situation with the purpose of promoting flourishing and happiness in practical settings. Practical wisdom still exists at the “limits” of technical knowledge and in relation to the aspects of life to which we remain technically ignorant, but when instructed by tragic wisdom, practical wisdom becomes more of a form of resignation or acceptance of fate than a “seeing-beyond” immediate technical problems or questions towards better, more moral solutions.

Arguably, the strongest case for discerning an opposition between a practical morality founded on *phronēsis* and a form of morality which places technological mediation and ascesis at its centre is in this way of conceiving tragedy. There are many examples where, through the use of technologies and problem-solving techniques, the persistence of the tragedy of action is seen as something surmountable rather than as a source of reflection and empathy. In professional settings there are “checklists” and technocratic procedures which are intended to ensure fairness but often end up distorting interpersonal relations.⁴⁹ Insurance companies provide “remedies” for tragic situations through institutional mediation, but the results of this process still remain questionable.⁵⁰ As David Lewin points out, the “technical interface” is becoming more and more pervasive, to the extent that our complex interactions with others and with our

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 247.

⁴⁹ “[A]s the mechanisms of professionalization have been put in place, so too have the levels of prescription increased, thereby circumscribing the capacity of members to act autonomously in situations that demand the exercise of judgement... This underlines the essential need to consider calls for *phronesis* in light of what Kemmis has called the extra-individual features of practice, including the social, cultural, material-economic, discursive, political, and policy dimensions.” Kinsella and Pitman, *Phronesis as Professional Knowledge*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ “Actuarial science employs a form of statistical modelling enabling insurance companies to consider their exposure to risks in order to calculate premiums providing coverage for such risks. For example, assessment of liability in auto insurance will consider, among other things, the age, gender, and credit rating of a driver. So while an insurance company provides a qualified guarantee to compensate individuals who have suffered a loss, the subsequent effect occurs as a sort of transvaluation via the social imagination—namely, risk and loss themselves have financial value.” Todd Mei, “The Relevance of an Existential Conception of Nature,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 10:2 (2014), 156.

technological devices become reduced to a series of easily negotiable buttons and icons.⁵¹ Although all of these examples emerge as responses to tragedy and uncertainty, these responses tend to see tragedy or vulnerability as problems to be solved rather than as inescapable experiences. As David H. Fisher writes, it is in a world populated by interfaces, “all consuming images,” and technocratic solutions that “*deinon phronēsis* can provide a way toward being grasped by the question of ethics.”⁵²

Furthermore, doesn't technology itself, understood as a particular form of mediating reality, pose its own tragic or “terrifying” dimension? Is it not this dimension that informs Verbeek's call to make the process of technological design more morally responsible? A recognition of “technical ignorance”, or the limits of *techne*, is arguably as terrifying as it is liberating. For example, Verbeek also highlights that technologies such as ultrasound scans open up new practical, ethical possibilities for living well, not because they show us how reality *is*, but because they de-stabilise and reorient sedimented practices and therefore possess a huge potential for helping shape human action in new ways. In this capacity to redirect and refigure action, technological designs contain their own normative stance and a type of conviction that allows for the possibility of conflict. For example, via the ultrasound scan, the father is brought into a new relation with the unborn child, a relation which may shape the way decisions will be made and convictions will be formed over the course of the pregnancy.⁵³

At the practical level, technologies have an extraordinary power over our relation with our circumstances. However, it is important to also recognise the limits of this power in the case of tragic situations. Although we can better understand ourselves and the other through developing more responsible, more beautiful, and more functional technologies, the solicitude that stems from the voice of the other and the voice of conscience will ultimately always transcend mediation and call for a different ethical response. This response may be *phronetic*, but not necessarily practical in the sense of being in harmony with a given situation. The singularizing call from conscience, which leads to conviction in a stance, may often direct one towards a position of rejection or disharmony with one's own surroundings. Just as conviction can lead to tragedy, so too can wisdom, if that wisdom emerges in a setting, or *sittlichkeit*, dominated by *techne*.

⁵¹ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology,” 64-67.

⁵² David H. Fisher, “Is *Phronesis Deinon*? Ricoeur on Tragedy and Phronesis,” in *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics*, ed. Francis J. Mootz III and George H. Taylor (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 157.

⁵³ Verbeek, “Obstetric Ultrasound,” 14-18.

Verbeek's response to this situation, which attempts to broaden our understanding of what technologies can do in practical environments, is a strong one, incorporating positive aspects of *phronēsis* and hermeneutic understanding. However, by placing technological mediation at the heart of moral deliberation, we are also in danger of obscuring crucial aspects of *phronēsis* that cannot be factored into a postphenomenological account of ethics, namely the human experiences of suffering and the corresponding feelings of empathy and forgiveness.

The intellectual virtues of *techne* and *phronēsis* are philosophically linked in their relation to practice and variable phenomena. Whereas a conventional understanding of how technologies work could lead us to conclude that practical wisdom and technical knowledge are in opposition to one another, the work of Verbeek challenges this assumption. *Practical* morality depends just as much on the tools or artefacts we use to mediate reality as on the reasoning capabilities of individuals. Gadamer's understanding of *techne* as presupposing *direct* application and as unrelated to knowledge of the self was called into question by Verbeek's postphenomenological account of the ambiguity of technological intentionality and technological ascesis. Technologies help to shape and define the contexts subjects find themselves in, and similarly, no technological design is "complete" until it has in a sense been "successfully" deployed in a setting. A technological design may be highly robust and functional, but may not find an appropriate horizon against which it can become a meaningful factor in human action. It is relevant to distinguish between these two types of "skills" in practical application because our understanding both of technologies *and* practical wisdom can be revised. Both "skills" - designing well (knowing *how*) and moral intuition and judgement in a situation (knowing *when*) - exist against a shared background of the *uncertainty* of application. Through Verbeek's work this uncertainty is refigured as something productive and liberating.

In contrast to Borgmann's strong distinction between *things* and *devices*, which emphasizes how we *belong* to the thing while we are *alienated* through the device, Verbeek's conception of technological mediation helps recognize the *distanciated* features of practical understanding better. His approach helps us to see the ways that technological designs can be seen as participating in Ricoeur's distanciation-belonging dialectic – technological designs are modes of effecting practical understanding at a distance (through mediation). Designs potentially open up new worlds and practices (for example, the ultra-sound scan) in the same way that distanced explanations or representations project new possibilities for action.

However, I have also suggested that if we over-emphasise the centrality of technological mediation, and in particular its power to refigure practical life, there is a danger of losing sight of the features of application which arguably are linked more strongly or asymmetrically to practical wisdom, namely the persistence of the tragic and the corresponding human capabilities for empathy, forgiveness, and the recognition of suffering. Although increased attention to the role of technologies in human action can guard against “misfortune” and tragedy, we also need to think about ways a reflection on technology can lead to a reflection on the inevitability of conflict in ethical life. Verbeek’s approach, which takes the fact of technological mediation as a *given*, is in danger of reconciling the tragedies of practice too quickly by focusing on the framework of “technological mediation” and “informed prediction.” Practical wisdom, which I have argued a postphenomenological view presupposes, has itself a more open function in terms of application, and for this reason there will always be an incommensurability between technologies and wisdom. By developing a broader picture of the process of application, we can begin to design more meaningful technologies, while at the same time gaining a deeper understanding of the fragility of all human practice.

6. THE INTERFACE

*Alterity cannot, by definition, be anticipated and factored into the design of the interface.*⁵⁴

*The computer instantiates a practice not a presence, an effect not an object.*⁵⁵

The previous chapter argued, by utilizing the resources of postphenomenological thought, that a practice-based distinction between a ‘device’ and a ‘thing’ can be challenged. Devices are not ‘univocal’, though paradigmatically they may strive toward univocity and functionality. Rather, they are ‘multistable’. As with a *thing*, new connections and relations can emerge through the activities of the device, as long as designers and users resist the temptation to treat the device as ‘invisible’ or ‘passive’. However, just as devices should not be pushed into the background, neither should they be seen as fully *present*; technological ascesis cannot replace the moral authority of the self possessed with *tragic wisdom*.

If Chapter 5 aimed to highlight the openness of technological devices to practical modes of appropriation, the following chapter aims to explore the hermeneutic character of the interaction between devices and practical understanding. As with the device, the interface initially appears, via hermeneutic critique, as guided by a logic of *univocity*. David Lewin suggests that it moves towards the construction of a *utopia of functionality*, due to its tendency to reduce complex operations to easily negotiable and understandable icons, buttons, menus, etc. In other words, just as with Borgmann’s critique of the device, the experience of engaging with an interface is always mediated by the goal of the interface’s design, which is to conceal uncertainty and alterity, features which would disrupt the flow of the user experience. We are dissuaded from considering the broader, contextual factors of the experience, such as the complexity of the machine or system that the interface is representing, or the actual ‘other’ whom we are communicating with via the interface, and so on.

The second part of the chapter draws on the work of Alexander Galloway to argue that the ‘distance’ created by the interface is more akin to a *practical* distance demanding negotiation rather than a theoretical or logical circumscription. As Galloway puts it, the interface is less of an Isis-figure (a veil, masking the true *nature* of the machine), and more of a Hermes-figure

⁵⁴ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 66.

⁵⁵ Alexander R Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Polity, 2012), 22.

(an active attempt at mediation). That is, it should be understood less in terms of what it *is*, and more by way of what it *does*, or more appropriately what it necessarily *fails* to do. As with Lewin, Galloway does accept that the interface is a functional medium, it aims to represent, in a more coherent or readable way, the workings of the technical operations that are being performed. However, the gap between what is being represented and the aesthetic demands of the interface, a gap the Lewin also highlights, renders the mediation of the interface perpetually incomplete. Whereas Lewin reads the logic of the interface as technological (a mode of enframing), Galloway instead examines it from an aesthetic perspective that emphasizes the *presentational* features over the *representational*. At this level, the interface performs its own contradictions, and in doing so invites a *practical* response.

For Galloway, the interface is defined not by its ‘essence’ or logic but by its *effects*. He focuses on political implications of coherent and incoherent aesthetics of the interface, and argues for the importance of paying closer attention to the impact of the incoherent, *unworkable*, interface. The ‘unworkable’ interface discloses its own ‘truth’; that as a form of mediation, it can never be total or fully transparent. Instead, “the digital interface in fact produces an autonomous zone of interaction, orthogonal to the human sensorium, concerned as much with unworkability and obfuscation as with connectivity and transparency.”⁵⁶

If Lewin helps us understand the ‘utopia’ dimension of the interface, and Galloway the unworkability of it, the final section of the chapter will attempt a resolution, by returning to hermeneutic accounts of representation. In her book *Computers as Theatre*, Brenda Laurel draws on, among other sources, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, to think-through the problems of human-computer interaction.⁵⁷ Crucially, what is aimed for in interface design is the establishment of a *common ground*, between the person interacting with the computer and the computation processes. The nature of this ground is representational and performative. In other words, in order to engage with a computer, it is necessary to have some sense of self-understanding, and this is presupposed in the design of the interface. Just as a theatre production will contain features of design which take into account in advance the existence of an *audience*, interfaces presuppose a space of creative application.

Along with Galloway, she conceives the interface not as a medium, but as a mediation process, and therefore as durational and dynamic. She compares the experience of engaging with a

⁵⁶ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 121.

⁵⁷ Brenda Laurel, *Computers as Theatre: Second Edition* (Addison-Wesley, 2014).

computer to the experience of going to the theatre where actions are performed, and meaningful experiences are constructed across a limited time-frame, with finite possibilities. In other words, the choices made by both designers and those engaging with the interface possess as much weight and significance as the choices made by theatre producers or audience goers. The interface does not present us with a ‘utopia’ of comfort, nor with an endless range of playful, meaningless decisions (what Galloway calls a ‘ludic economy’), rather, it provides a framework or context in which meaningful action is possible.

6.1 THE UTOPIA OF FUNCTIONALITY – INTERFACE AND REPRESENTATION

As this thesis is concerned with hermeneutic questions of application, it is useful to move beyond the question of artefacts and design, towards the question of the ‘threshold’ across which many technological applications take place: the interface. Technologies, which in one way or another, are directed towards producing effects in the world, can only be ‘guided’ or instructed to do so via an interface, that is, *at a distance*. Not ‘distance’ in the sense of being separated from, but distance in Ricoeur’s sense of distanciation; interfaces introduce an intermediary position between us and a technological process that enables us to participate in this process whilst remaining distinct from it. The difference between a plumber fixing a pipe, or a computer engineer writing code, and a person washing their hands in a sink or opening a window on their computer screen, represents two different ways of participating in the same process. The plumber or engineer has a specific set of concerns. Although they stand ‘outside’ a system, in a position of control, the concerns that guide their action and choices are ‘internal’ to the system they are working with - their concerns are ‘cybernetic’ and direct. In contrast, the person washing their hands or running applications on their operating system is also engaging with the system, but is bringing along their own set of concerns to the process, concerns which may be ‘external’ to the functioning of the technical system. If the relation between the engineer and the system is cybernetic, the relation between the ‘user’ and the system is indirect and *recursive* – shifts in interface design affect user experience, and user expectations affect the design and application of technologies.⁵⁸ This logic was explored in Chapter 2.

⁵⁸ For the difference between a “cybernetic” and “recursive/autopoietic” approaches to systems, see Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 83-113.

To think of an interface as a ‘threshold’, then, is perhaps misleading. It does not stand as a ‘window’ between two worlds, one technological and the other human. Rather, from the perspective of ‘world’ and ‘action’, it is a necessary mediation. The potential worlds contained in technological arrangements only come into effect via the interface.

Hermeneutic appropriation or application, as we have seen, involves two stages; understanding a text, language, discourse, etc. in-itself, in its context, and so on, and understanding oneself in light of the text. Application is the concrete fusion of these two horizons, a self-understanding reflected through a particular, historically-rooted expression. This self-understanding does not just ‘happen’, it is ‘enacted’, through the reading process. As Ricoeur and Gadamer highlight, since the text, or language, always has its own ‘nature’ or ‘being’ (autonomy), and therefore is always to some extent ‘foreign’ to us, application/appropriation as a fusion of horizons is also the act of establishing a common ground across a distance. The initial distance (due to history, inscription, culture, etc.) is a necessary condition for the appearance of this common ground. To have something at a distance is also to allow an in-between, indeterminate space to emerge between oneself and the thing-at-hand, a space that can potentially be filled or ‘negotiated’ in the process of engagement (e.g., reading). If, as Heidegger points out, technology, although appearing proximate, is always at a ‘distance’ from us,⁵⁹ then the interface can potentially be seen as the medium across which a “common ground” may emerge.

The question when it comes to the interface is whether the space of ‘negotiation’, mediated by it, is fully *controlled*. Are ‘users’ of interfaces merely passive operators of technological processes? Or, rather, is the space mediated by the interface a properly *liminal* space, a space of communication “in and through distance”, with the ‘agency’ of both sides playing significant but distinct roles? For David Lewin, the logic of the interface aims to render us passive users, even if it never totally achieves this goal.

Lewin’s essay on the interface argues for the relevance of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics in relation to questions of technology. He dismisses the idea that Ricoeur’s work has nothing to say about technology simply because it does not discuss it thematically. Rather, drawing on Heidegger and central tenants of hermeneutic thinking, Lewin suggests questions of technology cannot be avoided since in modern times it conditions our interpretative structures. It has become a feature of our historically effected consciousness, and as such its structures resist thematization,

⁵⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Thing”, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper and Row, 1975). 165-166.

“Like Heidegger’s famous example of the hammer, a hermeneutic is most presence in its absence.”⁶⁰ Because of this, the way to approach technology, following Heidegger, is directly; not by way of devices and artefacts, but through inquiry into its essence (*das Wesen der Technik*). Or, rather, we should approach devices and artefacts themselves indirectly, by inquiring into the essence that underpins their design. This allows one to fully grasp technology’s nature as a condition of disclosure, rather than as a set of identifiable processes or objects, “If we can expand our understanding in this direction, then technology is only secondarily defined by artefacts, but is to primarily be understood as the way in which the world shows itself.”⁶¹

For Lewin, what is specific to *this* historical epoch or condition of the human is the question of *freedom*, “modern technology is the context in which the question of human freedom arises.”⁶² This is the point at which Ricoeur’s work becomes meaningful, since his is a philosophy that charts a path between Cartesian understandings of the subject and Nietzschean testimonies of the fragmented, rhetorical self. That is, freedom is not synonymous with autonomy, in opposition to heteronomy, instead, it involves aspects of both.⁶³ Lewin sees this polarity repeated in discussion of modern technology;

Agency is too often seen in polarized terms as either the possession of the sovereign subject - in which case technologies are simply neutral devices that we take or leave – or a feature of autonomous technology that has gotten out of hand. Within the context of hermeneutical philosophy, agency is not a concept that can simply be applied to a subject (or an object, namely, technology), but is meaningful only within a particular interpretive context.⁶⁴

Furthermore, as discussed in the first chapter, the reason technology is a particular concern for hermeneutics is because of the modes of rationality it entails, “[technological rationality] seeks to displace a hermeneutic relation to being.”⁶⁵ Lewin sees these two poles of concern, the displacement of a hermeneutic relation to being by technological rationality, and the historical disclosure of questions of human agency and freedom, manifested in the technical interface.

⁶⁰ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 63.

⁶¹ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 57.

⁶² Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 58.

⁶³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 273-283.

⁶⁴ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 55.

⁶⁵ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 54.

Lewin's description of the logic of the interface conceives it as being aimed at the erasure of practical wisdom; it seeks to destroy the hermeneutic relation to the world. He writes; "Behind all technologies is a basic desire to foreground functionality and conceal complex operations; to foreground ends, and conceal the means to those ends."⁶⁶ As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Aristotle understands *phronēsis* as the capability to deliberate about ends in relation to the means of achieving those ends. Following this, the threat of the interface lies in its concealing of complexity through the presentation of functionality, it conceals its own *means* and therefore practical concerns. Devoid of practical concerns we cease to become persons and instead are reduced to 'users'. Complex operations are presented to us as simple 'buttons' and 'icons'. Ends are presented as being easily within reach, there is no longer a need for deliberation. As devices themselves become more complex, their interface design becomes simpler and more sophisticated, they become easier to use. In this way, the 'being' of the device (complexity) is *circumscribed* by the technological rationality embodied in the interface,

This tendency towards circumscribed functionality gives us the impression that device does not exist with an interpretive context, but within a decontextualized utopia of functionality. As attractive as this utopia seems to be – it is, after all, exactly what the user wants the device to achieve – it negates the hermeneutic dimension of existence by its presentation of unmediated function.⁶⁷

It is still something that 'mediates', but it conceals this fact by closing down possibilities of (or the need for) interpretation through its utopia of functionality. 'Alterity' is not admitted into the design of the interface since it disrupts functionality. In this way, it seeks to erase the sacred or symbolic aspects of existence. The symbolic, as we saw, is the realm of double-meaning and uncertainty, of the possibility of the self being other than itself. Whereas the symbol "gives rise to thought", "the device only ever does what we ask of it. In so doing it cannot give rise to genuine thought."⁶⁸ If technology works to conceal its own interpretive *context*, then, according to Ricoeur's view of autonomy indicated above, it works to negate human *freedom*, which always appears against an interpretive background.

Nevertheless, Lewin's criticism of the interface follows the same course as a Ricoeurian hermeneutics of suspicion. That is, he seeks to *unmask* the 'technological hermeneutic'. The interface, in its mode of circumscription — in seeking to eliminate the need for interpretation

⁶⁶ Lewin, "Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology", 64.

⁶⁷ Lewin, "Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology", 65.

⁶⁸ Lewin, "Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology", 66.

— gives rise to the thing it aims to conceal, “From a philosophical point of view, the technological hermeneutic discloses its own negation of alterity and thereby its effort to conceal hermeneutics only serves to demonstrate a deeper hermeneutic taking place.”⁶⁹ This ‘deeper’ hermeneutic is a more general hermeneutic concerning our (human) relation to things, which technology participates in. Since, for Ricoeur, we are never wholly ‘free’ nor wholly ‘determined’, the rationality of the interface can never totally conceal this relation to the thing. While admitting that questions of agency and freedom should not be too quickly solidified, for example by being attributed to “only certain kinds of humans, or certain ‘higher’ species”, Lewin does not want to “simply wish away this primary distinction [between persons and things] that informs Ricoeur’s work at the deepest level.”⁷⁰

For Lewin, the technological hermeneutic is unmasked by appealing to this ontological distinction between persons and things; the being that gave rise to technology (*Dasein*) can never be wholly eclipsed by it, since it always remains something other than a mere object. As we become ‘users’, our fundamental capability to instantiate a relation to the world, even a technological one, is reflected in the interface, even as it aims to conceal this capacity.

However, just as with the device in the previous chapter, the interface itself can potentially be seen to have a *thing*-like character, in that its modes of presentation include moments of reflexivity and what Galloway calls *unworkability*. This feature of the interface is revealed by focusing, instead, on the *practical* language of the interface, as opposed to the logic that underpins this language. Or, to use Gadamer’s terms, the “nature of a thing” as determined by theoretical or technical knowledge, is something different than the “language of a thing”, which is more reflective of the participation of both subject and thing in the process of coming to know.⁷¹ To move from one to the other is to move from the ontological to the practical field. With this in mind, I will now turn to Galloway’s reading of the interface. Galloway reads it through the lens of aesthetics and politics, and it is these features which bring us closer to the practical ‘language’ of the interface, which remains distinct from its ontological ‘logic’.

⁶⁹ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 70.

⁷⁰ Lewin, “Ricoeur and the Capability of Modern Technology”, 69.

⁷¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things”, in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* trans. and ed. David E. Linge (University of California Press, 1977), 69-82.

6.2 THE UTOPIA OF DYSFUNCTIONALITY – INTERFACE AND PRESENTATION 1

In the above-mentioned distinction between the ‘nature of things’ and the ‘language of things’, gestured toward by Gadamer, one of his aims is to undermine our presumption to *know* a thing fully by determining its nature. Whereas both of the everyday expressions, “*Es liegt in der Natur der Sache*” and “*Die Dinge sprechen für sich selber*”, seem to express the common Enlightenment attitude of asserting a necessary distinction between (biased) subjects and objects in the pursuit of knowledge, when examined closer a crucial difference emerges. The type of knowledge associated with the nature of the thing is gained through methods and procedures, aimed at either identifying or controlling materials, and is associated broadly with the modern, scientific worldview. The *language* of a thing reveals something different about its nature. What a thing ‘says’ includes its relation to an observer or participant. At the theoretical level, the difference between the nature and the language of a thing is knowledge that is determined by establishing a system of correspondences, on the one hand, and knowledge being revealed within particular paradigms or horizons, on the other. At the practical level, we have the difference between *techne* and practical understanding repeated. A *techne* or technique is aimed at working with, and often controlling, the nature of the thing, whereas practical understanding works by allowing the thing to speak for itself. ‘Thing’ here is taken in Gadamer’s sense to refer not only to material things, but also the subject *matter*. Whereas, practically speaking, we must call upon a variety of techniques and methods when analysing a discourse, we are also called on to acknowledge the *effects* of the subject matter, how it impacts me and alters my identity. Viewing the thing in terms of its ‘nature’ keeps me at a distance, while the language of the thing implicates me.

The appeal to the “language of things” has a polemical accent, “It expresses the fact that, in general, we are not at all ready to hear things in their own being, that they are subjected to man’s calculus and to his domination of nature through the rationality of science.”⁷² Whereas a distanced examination of the nature of the thing ensures progress and advancements of human knowledge, Gadamer asserts a more fundamental indeterminacy in the person-thing relation, expressed through the medium of language. Before truth is a ‘correspondence’ between the nature of the thing and our abstract knowledge of it, it is a ‘linguistic agreement’ that occurs

⁷² Gadamer, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things”, 71.

between person and thing, with neither possessing absolute agency, “The agreement about things that takes place in language means neither a priority of things nor a priority of the human mind that avails itself of the instrument of linguistic understanding. Rather, the correspondence that finds its concretion in the linguistic experience of the world is as such what is absolutely prior.”⁷³

The spirit of this distinction is at work, as I read it, in Alexander Galloway’s book, *The Interface Effect*. His project aims to move away from ontological accounts found in many influential media theorists, towards a consideration of the *practical effects* of contemporary technologies, i.e., he moves from a consideration of the nature of the interface towards the language of the interface. The tradition he appeals to is similar to the tradition discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the alternate understanding of *techne* as being related to questions of the *self*. In contrast to theorizing media *qua* media, he wishes to return to questions of *mediation*, i.e., to move away from a focus on objects and media artefacts, towards the activities they instantiate. Whereas he reads Kittler and McLuhan as “conservative” in their focus on media objects, where *techne* “is substrate and only substrate”, he gestures towards “an alternate philosophical tradition that views *techne* as technique, art, habitus, ethos, or lived practice.”⁷⁴ In this tradition, mediation is not reducible to an easily resolved ‘middle’ position, a point (in this case, an artefact) outside the mediating activity itself. Just as in the case of hermeneutics, where a ‘mediated’ dialogue does not mean an externally ‘resolved’ dialogue, but rather a dialogue which is *carried* along by the indeterminate force of language itself, mediation, as opposed to ‘media’ cannot be reduced to an objective state;

When Kittler elevates substrates and apparatuses over modes of mediation, he forfeits an interest in techniques in favour of an interest in objects. A middle – a compromise, a translation, a corruption, a revelation, a certainty, an infurcation, a touch, a flux, is not a medium, by virtue of it not being a technical media device.⁷⁵

Approaching interfaces from the perspective of ‘mediation’, as opposed to ‘media’, means putting them in the difficult position of being *in-between*. This entails a double-bind: the in-between is at once responsible for distinguishing between two points, whilst at the same time being in no clear place itself. Whereas boundaries such as ‘windows’, door-frames, and so on, clearly delimit two places, the interface, conceived of as *activity*, is by nature non-fixed and

⁷³ Gadamer, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things”, 78.

⁷⁴ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 16.

⁷⁵ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 18.

indeterminate. The more ‘coherent’ or fixed an interface becomes, the more it withdraws from view and the less it resembles an interface. On the other hand, the more ‘incoherent’ it becomes, the more it draws attention to itself and the less it actually ‘mediates’ anything. For Galloway, this aspect of mediation means that the relation is not “chronological, spatial, or even semiotic,”⁷⁶ rather, it is a systemic one. On this point he quotes Michel Serres:

Systems work because they don’t work. Non-functionality remains essential for functionality. This can be formalized: pretend there are two stations exchanging messages through a channel. If the exchange succeeds – if it is perfect, optimal, immediate – then the relation erases itself. But if the relation remains there, if it exists, it is because the exchange has failed. It is nothing but mediation. The relation is a non-relation.⁷⁷

Here, we have the tension repeated that we have been exploring so far. For Lewin, the danger was that the logic of the interface (the reduction of complexity to easily negotiable operations) would *succeed* in its aim, therefore ‘erasing’ or concealing that a mediation process is occurring (that the interface mediating and re-presenting the complexities of the technology). However, Lewin admits that this process can never succeed completely, and that a recognition of this point reveals a ‘deeper’ hermeneutic at work (the hermeneutic relation between modern technology and human freedom, between totality and finitude, and so on). In this way the interface is both anti-hermeneutic (in its aims) and hermeneutic (in its failure to succeed), it is both ‘technological’ (in the negative, critical sense), and ‘hermeneutic’ (disclosive). Galloway carries this point further and categorizes the interface as *unworkable*. The idea of the unworkable interface is intended to eschew the false polarity between ‘Iris’ and ‘Hermes’; “Representation is either clear or complicated, either inherent or extrinsic, either beautiful or deceptive, either already known or endlessly interpretable. In short, either Iris or Hermes.”⁷⁸ Instead, both aspects are contained within the interface, both ‘coherence’ and ‘incoherence’, and it is the perpetuation of both these forces that render it a mediation process. In this sense, the idea of the unworkable interface is similar to Ricoeur’s own formula for narrative representation — ‘concordant discordance’.

⁷⁶ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 25.

⁷⁷ Michel Serres, *Le Parasite* (Paris: Éditions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1980), 107.

⁷⁸ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 26.

The terms ‘coherence’ and ‘incoherence’ refer to the aesthetic qualities of the interface. Galloway illustrates the difference with reference to a painting by Norman Rockwell, *Triple Self-Portrait*, and a parody of this image that appeared in *Mad* magazine. The first is emblematic of the coherence of the interface – the portrait self-consciously gestures towards its own artifice, but only to render this artifice more solid and centred. It draws the viewer towards an appreciation of the face, whilst aiming to conceal the interface or mediation process that brought their eye to rest at this point. It is a celebration and centring of craft and representation as such, “There is a circulation of coherence within the image that gestures toward the outside, while ultimately remaining afraid of it.”⁷⁹ In this reading, the painting self-consciously gestures toward an anticipated audience member (one familiar with questions of representation, craft, etc.) in order to pre-empt and fulfil their desire to interpret or understand the image. In short, it shrewdly eschews the problematic space of hermeneutic application – it ‘mediates’ on the viewers behalf whilst also concealing that the mediation has taken place. Yet, to read it solely in this semiotic way, that is, in the way it aims to gesture towards paratextual elements in order to reify its own expression, is to miss out on the crucial gesturing *process* itself. Galloway iterates here that the interface is always an effect: “The stress here is that one must always think about the image as a process, rather than as a set of discreet, immutable terms. The paratextual (or alternatively, the nondiegetic) is in this sense merely the process of outering, of exteriority.”⁸⁰

The image from *Mad* magazine replicates the image, but highlights and intensifies the elements responsible for the ‘outering’ process in the original, rendering the disavowal of the Rockwell image more visible. The illustrator of the *Mad* image, Richard A. Williams, is not concerned as much with questions of technique or art, as he is with provoking a response in the viewer. In this way, he embraces the ‘unworkability’ of the interface more so than Rockwell, viewing the space of application as a territory to be conquered rather than as an uncertainty to be avoided,

Every ounce of energy within the image is aimed at its own externalization. Looking back at the history of art-making, one remembers that addressing the viewer is a very special mode of representation that is often saved or segregated or cast off and reserved for special occasions. It appears in debased forms like pornography, or folk forms like home video, or marginalized political forms like Brechtian theatre, or forms of ideological interpellation like the nightly news.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 34.

⁸⁰ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 36-37.

⁸¹ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 38.

Galloway's point in tracing the workings of these opposing forces is to subsequently map the corresponding "regimes of signification" they imply. The Rockwell painting, and its aesthetic of coherence, presents the interface without actually 'enacting' it, whilst the *Mad* magazine parody 'enacts' the effects of the interface without believing in its content. These two approaches correspond to two types of political activity; 'coherent' politics, which is centralised, organised, etc., and 'incoherent' politics, which is politics that seeks ruptures with past configurations. These four categories are then permuted to produce four 'regimes of signification':

- (1) Ideological: an aesthetics of coherence, a politics of coherence;
- (2) Ethical: an aesthetics of incoherence, a politics of coherence;
- (3) Poetic: an aesthetics of coherence, a politics of incoherence;
- (4) Truth: and aesthetics of incoherence, a politics of incoherence.⁸²

For Galloway, the interface effect, as seen at work in videogames like *World of Warcraft* where a representational depiction of a world or scene is overlaid by multiple dialogue-boxes and menus, signals a shift in current political regimes from the "ideological" to the "ethical".⁸³ The term ethical here refers simply to the *practical* dimension of the interface effect. The coherent modes of politics it produces can range from Brechtian Marxism to what Galloway calls the "ludic economies" of contemporary times – in which we are both encouraged to 'play freely' and 'express' ourselves as much as possible, whilst being encircled by cybernetic loops of reference (so that it is always a 'controlled' play).⁸⁴ In the case of *World of Warcraft*,

The game displays an aesthetics of incoherence in that it foregrounds the apparatus (statistical data, machinic functions, respawn loops, object interfaces, multithreading, and so on), while all the time promoting a particularly coherent politics (protocolological organisation, networked integration, alienation from the traditional social order, new

⁸² Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 51.

⁸³ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 51.

⁸⁴ Elsewhere, Galloway cites Deleuze to illustrate this point, "A control is not a discipline. In making freeways, for example, you don't enclose people but instead multiply the means of control. I am not saying that this is the freeway's exclusive purpose, but that people can drive infinitely and 'freely' without being at all confined yet while still being perfectly controlled. This is our future." Gilles Deleuze, "Having an Idea in Cinema", in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, eds. Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1998) 18. Quoted in Alexander R. Galloway, "Computers and the Superfold", *Deleuze Studies* 6.4 (2012), 522.

informatic labor practices, computer-mediated group interaction, neoliberal markets, game theory, and so forth).⁸⁵

We could also add the examples from the design collective *Eternally Yours*, discussed earlier (Chapter 5) – works which seek to foreground the ‘unworkable’ interface of the device to provoke an ethics of product sustainability.

The third regime, the ‘poetic’, is probably the regime where one would tend to place many forms of hermeneutic thinking, since hermeneutics often emphasizes the inherent value of a *work*, and indeed Galloway does associate Heidegger with this regime. The category ‘poetic’ resonates with *poiesis*,

It is labelled “poetic” simply because it aligns itself with *poiesis*, or meaning-making in a general sense. The stakes are not those of metaphysics, in which any image is measured against its original, but rather the semiautonomous “physics” of art, that is, the tricks and techniques that contribute to success or failure within mimetic representation as such.⁸⁶

The *practicality* of the interface is linked to its aesthetic incoherence, which distinguishes it from a Heideggerian “work of art” – a coherent *work* that draws together, with the aid of techniques and practical experience, a finished or ‘complete’ thing. The aim of a work of art in this sense, is not to conform to a “metaphysical” ideal, but to present in a unified, intelligible form, its own conditions of making. The interface is indeed more ‘technological’ in this sense, its incoherence foregrounds its own technique and tool-like character. It can either become a tool for performatively reinforcing a certain ideological politics, or it can become a destabilising tool for performing a ‘truth’.

Yet, in contrast to Heidegger, the work of Ricoeur and Gadamer is marked by its turn to the centrality of practical engagement with *others* when thinking about the work of understanding. If, for Heidegger, the work of art ‘gathers’ together its conditions by presenting them, Ricoeur and Gadamer’s rehabilitation of appropriation and application means that any gathering or consistency of a work is vulnerable to being overturned by interpreting communities. In particular, for Ricoeur, an *explanation* of the work, a decoding and critique of its techniques and structures, is crucial to the process of understanding it. In this sense, a technique is never celebrated in-itself, but only in relation to the historical or communal background against which

⁸⁵ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 49.

⁸⁶ Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 49.

it becomes visible and effective. This places Ricoeur's account of a *work* somewhere in between the idea of a coherent, unified work, and an incoherent interface-mediated experience. In line with the thrust of this thesis, which places emphasis on the co-determining movements of appropriation and construction, hermeneutics would be placed somewhere in between the regimes of 'ethics' and 'poetics' - a work is marked both by the sincere intention to 'say something about something', whilst also being 'plagued' by rhetorical strategies, failures of technique, etc., aspects which call out for further reflection and engagement. Similarly, the political side of the work is determined by the mixed nature of the work; communities are defined both by the traditions that condition them and the innovations they bring about in trying to break with tradition. In this way, there could be a fifth regime:

(5) Hermeneutic: aesthetics of concordant discordance, politics of tradition-innovation

With regard to the earlier discussion of technology and time, drawing on the work of Simpson, it was argued that technology shifts our focus from participating in the *meaning* of a practice to 'valuing' the frame of a practice. For Simpson, there was a cost in this shift of attention; meaning is *conditioned* or presented 'within' a frame of reference, so that the valuation of a frame itself results in a translation of meaning from something conditioned to something determinable in advance. Galloway has a similar conception of the technical interface, its perpetual 'framing' results in an 'unworkable' erasure of content. However, for Galloway the outcome of such a framing is not fixed in advance. He focuses on the 'unworkability' of the interface as an effect-producing phenomenon, and therefore as *practical*. It is practical because its negativity (negation of content, of direct presentation) provokes a response from a self. As a symptom of the failure of technique, it is also the beginning of practice.

Galloway's claim that the computer instantiates a 'practice', not a 'presence', quoted at the outset of this chapter, stems from this notion of the unworkable interface. As I have argued, practical understanding is constituted not only through relations of belonging (in this case a 'politics') but also through distancing (in this case an 'aesthetic regime'). The interface participates in practical understanding by standing a distance from it. In particular, practical considerations arise due to the negativity or *unworkability* of the interface. By highlighting the unworkability of the interface, Galloway enables us to perceive the failure, or incompleteness, as the heart of a functioning interface, but also to perceive the crucial role the *receiver* of the message plays in constituting the effects of the interface. Its mixture of both coherent and incoherent representations, of its need to draw attention to both itself and to a space beyond

itself, means that a subject engaging with the interface is tasked with negotiating these tensions. Or, rather, with *appropriating* them, since the term ‘negotiating’ may suggest that the ‘user’ somehow ‘completes’ the work of mediation. It would be more appropriate to say that the user temporally resolves tensions through developing a practical stance in relation to the interface and its technical lacunas. In hermeneutic thought, the experience of failure gives rise to the need for reflection, not for intellectual reasons, but due to the need for practical closure. When we experience failure, our pre-understandings of the world, and therefore our patterns of understanding that make up our identity, are put into question. Reflecting on failure is more than a technical or intellectual endeavour, it involves a reflection on our conditions of belonging to a world, and for these reasons failure *effects* reflection, or ‘gives rise to/provokes’ it in Ricoeur’s terms. Galloway comes to a similar conclusion about the interface, its unworkability means the interface should be understood through its ‘effects’, and therefore through the role it takes up in its space of application. As a counterpart to the unworkability of the interface, we find a myriad of practical solutions, ‘workarounds’ and hacks. Galloway highlights the political and ideological questions arising in that space, but his overall aim is to *historicize* the interface against tendencies to reify a ‘ludic’ mode of existence suggested by it.

6.3 CONSTRUCTING A COMMON GROUND – INTERFACE AND PRESENTATION 2

Galloway’s definition of the interface as an effect, and therefore as practical, resonates with earlier investigations into the practice-technique dialectic. The potential problem of the interface, for Galloway, was the rise of the regime of what Deleuze calls ‘control societies’; interfaces both embrace the ‘freedom’ of a playful, interacting subject, whilst simultaneously controlling them. Whereas for Lewin the interface threatens to annihilate human freedom, for Galloway it ‘economises’ freedom.

The work of Brenda Laurel can be illustrative here. Her book, *Computers as Theatre*, written from the perspective of a practitioner theoretically reflecting on her field, implicitly employs key hermeneutic concepts to articulate the structure of human-computer relations. Her approach is, in many ways, phenomenological. She explores the question by focusing on the *experiential* dimension of human-computer activity, and does so by inquiring into the structures and forms that shape this experience, structures which she argues are remarkably similar to

those outlined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.⁸⁷ Aristotle's *Poetics* is also a key source for Ricoeur's theory of narrative and, therefore, the two approaches overlap at various points. The implicit hermeneutic grounds for her inquiry appear in these Aristotelian understandings of performance and representation, but even more so in her overall framing of the computer-human situation as one in which a *common ground* is being sought for through the activity of participating subjects within pre-established structures/constraints. Just as narrative representations for Ricoeur are understood as *mimetic*, the interface, in seeking a common ground, *repeats* the practices it is aiming to enable (for example, composing a spreadsheet) in a technological mode. This mimetic function, as with narrative, introduces a difference which enables the emergence of innovations and new procedures from within the context of the representation itself, for example, new techniques or ways of doing something that arise due to the processing power of computers.

The idea of a common ground is a difficult one, as it may seem at first sight to be built around the exclusion of the other (of the alterity of the machine, for example). If this were the case then it would bring the computer-human interaction in line with what Lewin was arguing about the logic of the interface. Computers and interfaces would be seen as objects that lead us to think in a technocratic way; the shared ground of computer-human interaction would be an impoverished one, devoid of meaning and alterity. However, this is not the sense in which Laurel uses the term common ground. For hermeneutics, a 'commonality' of sense, does not exist prior to engagement, as something fixed that a conversation works towards. Rather, commonality emerges in and through the understanding process. Aiming to understand the other does not necessarily mean aiming to find what we have in common. The idea of the 'other' is already built-in to the concept of a common ground - it is meaningless to come to an agreement with oneself. Agreement is not something that can be 'programmed' in advance. In fact, it is the inverse of something that can be anticipated, it emerges only through the transformation of oneself through revision of one's expectations or anticipations in the face of the other. There is a 'formation' process occurring, but it is not led by either side of a dialogue, but by the process of interaction itself,

⁸⁷ The term 'experiential' here is being used in a different sense than Laurel herself uses it. She does not situate her work within this suggested phenomenological framework. She does employ the term 'experiential' in order to distinguish between 'productive' and 'experiential' activities, for example, a productive activity might be editing an Excel spreadsheet, whereas an experiential activity might involve playing a video game. Of course, she herself collapses any distinctions between the two (such as 'productivity' being a 'serious' activity vs. the 'playfulness' of video games), Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 32.

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. . . . No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. . . . All this shows is that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists.”⁸⁸

So, the fusion of horizons is not brought about by will or wilful action, but by *interaction*. Furthermore, understanding, or the production of a commonality across a distance, is an “emergent” phenomenon. A common ground is something that happens to be *produced* through interactive engagement. This conception of understanding and commonality is mirrored by Laurel. For example, she traces the different, historical senses of ‘conversation’ between computers and humans - in earlier cases computers were controlled using knobs and dials, later by punch cards, followed by early forms of visual display (“glass teletypes”) and command line interfaces, etc. All situations in which humans and computers were imagined to be ‘conversing’ in a “tit-for-tat” manner, “a person does something and the computer responds.”⁸⁹ However, “as advanced linguistics demonstrated, there is more to conversation than tit for tat. Dialogue is not just linearized turn taking in which I say something, you go think about it, then you say something, I go think about it, and so on.”⁹⁰ An alternative approach to conversation emphasizes the importance of a common ground, therefore transforming the ‘role’ the interface plays. The interface is not just a ‘messenger’, carrying instructions between users and the system, instead, “it forms a shared context for action in which both [person and computer] are agents.”⁹¹ For example, she cites the work of Susan Brennan, writing,

Brennan’s work was aimed at designing human-computer interfaces so that they offer means for establishing common ground (“grounding”) that are similar to those that people use in human-to-human conversation, such as interruptions, questions, and utterances and gestures that indicate whether something is being understood.⁹²

⁸⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 385.

⁸⁹ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 3.

⁹⁰ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 3-4.

⁹¹ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 5.

⁹² Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 5. Susan E. Brennan, “Conversation as Direct Manipulation: An Iconoclastic View.” In *The Art of Human-Computer Interface Design*, edited by Brenda Laurel. (Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA, 1990).

Laurel's own work stresses the performative and representational character of this common ground, comparing the work of an interface designer with that of a set designer for a theatre production, "both create representations of objects and environments that provide a context for action."⁹³ As with a theatre production, series of actions achieved in human-computer interaction develop temporally, and this temporal sequence is also itself a product of interaction and is represented by the interface, as in cases when the interface conserves prior actions and re-presents them to users. An application contains a potential range of actions and outcomes, but the sequence that becomes actual is left open to be determined by concrete the human-computer interaction itself.⁹⁴ This temporal aspect of the interface is a trace of the incompleteness of the technological hermeneutic which Lewin discussed. The interface does not only present a range of functions, it also presents itself: "What is represented in the interface is not only the task's environment and tools, but also the process of interaction – the contributions made by both parties and the evidence of the task's evolution."⁹⁵

This 'feedback' from the interface is important in understanding the productive nature of human-computer interaction. Certainly, many forms of interface feedback are designed to invisibly 'nudge' us towards specific actions, which makes the feedback process more a means of coercion than collaboration. However, as we saw from Galloway's description of the interface, it is often 'unworkable', it presents us with its own uncertainty and failure, forcing a practical resolution.

Whether coercive or unworkable, the point for Laurel is that it is firstly temporal. In relation to the earlier discussion of technology and time, Laurel's work challenges assumptions that technology is aimed primarily towards the reduction of temporality (and therefore uncertainty). All the *dramatic* potential of temporal experience, thwarted expectations, catharsis, fulfilment, and so on, are to be found in the design of computers and interfaces. As she writes:

Assume for a moment that you have gone to the theatre not knowing what is playing. You sit in your seat. Anything is possible until the curtain goes up. When you face a computer screen, anything is possible until you turn on the device and see what sorts of applications and affordances are present.⁹⁶

⁹³ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 14.

⁹⁴ The terms 'actual' and 'potential' and Laurel's terms, being employed in their Aristotelian sense. Later, she also uses the notion of the 'flying wedge' to discuss the parallels between the way a theatre production and software application 'begin' and 'end'; they start out with a wide range of questions and possible outcomes, which are gradually narrowed over the course of action. Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 82-95.

⁹⁵ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 11.

⁹⁶ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 82.

That is, the computer-human experience takes place over a dramatic, flux-like timeframe. It even has a beginning-middle-end structure, starting with switching something on, not knowing fully in advance what is to be expected, or what will cause an end-point to arrive. The fact that machines and software applications are, to a large extent, ‘pre-programmed’, containing a ‘limited’ or prescribed range of possibilities, does not concern Laurel. Taking her cue from theatre and Aristotle, she asserts instead that all meaningful experience involves constraint. Her ‘structuralist’ approach to software design is not to be confused with an overly-technical desire to ‘control’ or map experience in advance. She writes: “As a structuralist, I have been assailed by both theatre and computer people for taking what they perceive as a rather bloodless approach. Structure is not always well understood, and even when it is, its uses are seen to be analytical rather than productive.”⁹⁷ Instead, paying attention to *structure*, at the level of software-design, is akin to the *configurational* task of narrative emplotment explored in Chapter 4. As with Ricoeur’s account of time, human temporality cannot be grasped independently of its structuration and emplotment in narrative form. By drawing attention to these features of computer and interface design, Laurel is highlighting its reflective relation to human understandings of meaning and temporality.

Whereas it is easy to identify the ways in which various structures mediate our experience of playing a video game, or participating in an interactive simulation, Laurel emphasizes that mediating structures provide dynamic contexts across all levels of computer-human interactions. For example, the appeal of many spreadsheet software applications is not simply their functionality, it is also the representative mode of the interface. This representative dimension provides a more ‘pleasing’ structuring of an action. To illustrate this, Laurel uses the example of deciding whether you can afford to buy a new house. She outlines the steps of the task that would involve preliminary evaluations, entering data and formulas, making trade-offs, creating an artefact, etc. She charts these steps using the format of a Freytag curve. At each level, the software provides formal parameters for an action, but requires guiding and input from the person using the application. There is direct feedback from calculations; you can witness how changing one factor of a decision may alter other factors, and determine better which variables to give more weight to. You can format and create an ‘artefact’ of the process, and “print the whole thing out to show my husband so that he, too, will be convinced”.⁹⁸ In

⁹⁷ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 109.

⁹⁸ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 105.

contrast, you could execute the same task using a pencil and paper, but “the action would lack organic wholeness; rather than the elegant Freytag-like curve, the action would more likely consist of long, flat-line segments of calculation punctuated by periods of analysis and planning with a completely different representational context and ‘feel’.”⁹⁹ As an alternative, spreadsheets like Excel are,

successful largely because they do an extremely good job of supporting whole actions with a satisfying degree of complexity, magnitude, and completeness. One could perform the same whole action as that in the previous example with a calculator, an abacus, or even a pencil and paper, but its magnitude (in the sense of duration) would be excruciatingly excessive.¹⁰⁰

Again, in contrast to Simpson’s view of technology and time, Laurel is arguing that the design of software and interfaces includes considerations of what counts as a ‘meaningful’, or at the very least, pleasurable, use of one’s time.

Although, Laurel does not use this language, Ricoeur’s notion of the “world of the text” is helpful here. As we saw in the cases of narrative and structuralism, there is a difference, for Ricoeur, between the ‘raw material’ of language, and even of various structures (myths, genres, tropes), and the world that is formed from the combination of these materials. The world of the text is always in excess of the component parts that make it up, thus rendering a structuralist or analytic account incomplete. Laurel has a similar perspective when it comes to the interface. Just as in the case of theatre, when the actual material components of a production (set backdrops, actors, scripts) combine to produce an effect which is something other than the pure material relations of the parts making up the effect, the interface effect is something other than a direct expression of the material parts of the machine. For example, in relation to the above example of the spreadsheet software, she writes:

Here we must separate the activity from its artefacts. The *representation* of a manuscript or spreadsheet as we manipulate in on screen is in fact pretend, as compared to physical artifacts like data files (in memory or on a storage medium) and hard copy. The artifacts are real (as are actors, lighting instruments, and scenery in a play), but the rules involved in working with the *representations* of dramatic actions or interactions are distinct from the artifacts.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 105.

¹⁰⁰ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 105.

¹⁰¹ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 139-140. Emphasis in original.

Why is this the case? Why the need for a supplementary rule-set in dealing with a technological device such as a computer? There are two main reasons, which I believe are related. The first reason is the expected one; someone engaging with a machine simply needs a different frame of reference for the engagement to take place, one that they are more familiar with. In Laurel's case, she draws parallels with traditions of representation, of our human capacities to 'suspend disbelief', to 'play', and so on. A software engineer will engage with the machine on a different level, just as the author will approach the construction of a text differently than the reader who takes it up in a new context. As we saw earlier in the case of narrative, a narrative is not simply an isolated system of signs and their relations, it is also an *intelligible*, organic whole, and the same is true in the design of computers, they are meant to be engaged with at the level of intelligibility and practical reason, not only at a rational level. In the case of commercial computers, especially, a designer's consideration of user experience outweighs considerations of maximizing the *functionality* of the machine. The machine functionality is not foregrounded, but instead is relegated to the level of an invisible 'constraint', a formal condition for the actual engagement that takes place between the person and computer,

Engagement is only possible when one can rely on the system to maintain the representational context. A person should not be forced to interact with the system *qua* system; indeed, any awareness of the system as a distinct, "real" entity would explode mimetic illusion, just as a clear view of the stage manager calling cues would disrupt the "willing suspension of disbelief" for the audience of a traditional play.¹⁰²

Laurel argues that instead of being concerned with representing what that machine is doing, designers need to pay more attention to representing what the *interactor* with the machine is doing. In contrast to Lewin's analysis of the logic of the interface, these alternative design concerns actually disrupt the pursuit of functionality. The logic of the interface is not a transcendent essence that transforms complex technological phenomena into utopias of functionality, rather, for Laurel, the program and the interface (and by implication, person using the interface), develop alongside one another,

How should an interface come to be? In effective interaction design, the interface does not simply come last; it develops throughout with the entire design process. It is deeply entwined with functionality. It shows sensitivity to the interactor and sometimes even constrains functionality that cannot or need not be touched effectively by the interactor. If we think of an application as an organic whole, the process by which it is created should be organic as well.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 140.

¹⁰³ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 16.

This question of how the interface ‘comes to be’ leads us to the second reason for the supplementary rule-set. If the first reason is ‘practical’ (interfaces need to employ familiar rules of representation to encourage engagement), then the second is ‘ontological’. Like Galloway, Laurel conceives the computer primarily as a medium, as opposed to an artefact. She enumerates this point as her first “design heuristic”: “Think of the computer not as a tool, but as a medium.”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, it is a medium with a history, which Laurel herself has participated in forming, and an open future. It is the uncertainty of what exactly computers can do, combined with the participatory medium of the interface that makes it an ontological question.

Throughout Laurel’s book, one of the key ideas she draws on from Aristotle is the difference between potentiality and actuality. Just as the integrative force of a narrative or theatre production gains its meaning effect from the way it closes-down the multiple potential outcomes or modes or representation, the software applications and interface designs of computers also constrain the ‘potentialities’ of the machine. When we engage with spreadsheet software we may forget the extent of the power of the machine that is running the software, but this is necessary for a meaningful engagement to take place.

Laurel’s primary aim is to encourage designers of interfaces and software to see their practice in a new way, through the lens of Aristotelian views on poetics. The practical skills required to orchestrate a theatre production resemble those which are called upon to produce a flourishing ‘user-experience’. Of course, a large amount of the pleasure derived from using computers or technological devices comes from increases in efficiency, power and so on, but the role of the designer is to constrain and redirect this potentiality in a way that will be meaningful for someone engaging with the device. Overall, this prioritising of the very ‘human’ side of human-computer interactions shifts focus from thinking about what a device is, to what it can do, and even, how it can ‘perform’ (with the term ‘performance’ taking on a different significance than it might usually have when placed alongside a description of a computer).

At the background of all these reflections, though, are questions about what technology *is*. Designers are also constrained by limitations of the device, as well as assumptions about what a computer is, “The characteristics of the interface for any given representation are influenced by the pragmatics of usage and principles of human factors and ergonomics, as well as by an

¹⁰⁴ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 151

overarching definition of what computers are.”¹⁰⁵ Aside from defining a computer as something that mediates human experience, the question of what they are, or what they will become is left relatively open. The openness of this question, though, is part of the nature of computers. It seems that what Laurel is describing is a classic hermeneutic circle of understanding, applications inform the construction of underlying structures, which in turn bring forth new possibilities for application and design.

It could be argued that technology serves a fundamentally different *social* function than, for example, theatre or poetry. We might be able to say that other representational mediums contain a broader socially agreed upon purpose, to represent to society the tragic or comic nature of life in the case of theatre, to express ‘eternal truths’ in the case of poetry, and so on. Yet what is being mediated or brought into view by computers? Is it, as Lewin argued, a ‘utopia of functionality’, devoid of alterity and uncertainty? Or, as Galloway argued, an indoctrination into the network-culture of control societies? These are, of course, the wrong questions to ask. Any ‘broader’ social or cultural purpose or framework is precisely what Heidegger criticised as a technological attitude. The point is, rather, that the hermeneutic circle between computers and their representations, that persists across all modes of representation, creates an indeterminacy that can only be resolved through practice and action. This is the point that Galloway helped us arrive at, and Laurel, too, sees this crucial practical aspect of computers, leading her to end her reflections on a note of hope, “Our lives are torn up by what we see looming in the future of Gaia. We succumb to the temptation to be always busy, to collaborate with our existing culture personally and professionally. Alternatives are difficult to imagine. And yet, we all know that we must not only imagine but *make* them...Hope is an active verb.”¹⁰⁶

Whether the interface is a mode of concealment, an unworkable mediation, or a common ground, its mediation is never total. This means that it acts as an opening for a consideration of the hermeneutic link between human agency and technology. The phenomena of the interface implies that there is always an in-between point of negotiation or interpretation that underlies our practical engagements with technologies. However, Galloway’s point that this indeterminacy can give rise to a *ludic economy*, a controlled mode of play that would never extend *beyond* the interface (either towards a deeper understanding of ourselves or of the technologies themselves), is important. The next chapter considers how a hermeneutic account of *play*, which Ricoeur argues is a key moment of appropriation, can potentially resolve this

¹⁰⁵ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 150.

¹⁰⁶ Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 219. emphasis in original

tension. The task will be to investigate whether what I have called the hermeneutic circle between technologies and their individual, practical modes of presentation is a vicious or virtuous circle. As we have seen, for Ricoeur, the work of understanding involves mediating between two perspectives – an objectifying, explanatory approach, and a participatory, engaged approach. So far in this section, I have considered the ways that technologies potentially shape human understanding, whether it be in a negative or positive sense. In the next chapter I will suggest that Ricoeur's account of play and appropriation provides a way of thinking about how human understanding can shape technology.

7. APPROPRIATING TECHNIQUES

The perspectives explored so far in this section can be seen to represent two sides of a conflict of interpretations. Borgmann and Lewin, along with Simpson in Chapter 4, are all highly *suspicious* of modern technology. Whereas, prior to the industrial era, techniques, skills, habits, and so on were *hermeneutic*, in the sense they were localised, interpretive and related to meaningful practices, modern technological phenomena express a unified, underlying logic which is detached from the world of human action and meaning. This logic is understood as the attempt to annihilate indeterminate temporal progressions through planning, controlling, etc. (Simpson); as following the ‘promise’ of technology, which is to make a function more available, transparent, and comfortable (Borgmann); or, as the attempt to reduce complexity to easy negotiable interfaces and operations (Lewin). These critiques, along with many of Ricoeur’s own comments on technology, all share a similar point – technologies are *impractical*, they displace us from our practical, hermeneutic relation to the world.

The other side of a conflict of interpretations is a phenomenology of hope, a restorative project which corresponds dialectically to a hermeneutics of suspicion. The works of Verbeek, Galloway and Laurel aim to embrace the potential for individual devices and technologies to productively shape and support meaningful action in the lifeworld. Ricoeur is also, to an extent, a representative of this approach, since he accepts that all action and understanding is mediated. Action involves a combination of a power to act on the part of the human agent, and the institutions and structures that enable this power to be expressed and communicated. I suggested in Section 3 that Ricoeur engages with the technique-aspect of practical understanding, since our understanding of the world is not only determined by relations of *meaning*, but the distanced structures that organise and condition this meaning. Provided that techniques are understood as modes of *distanciation* as opposed to a distanced mode of manipulation or control, it is possible to imagine forms of practical appropriation that correspond to the use of techniques (for example, the concrete activity of reading).

There are hermeneutic limitations to the constructive features of this approach, however. Although we can develop better-informed practices of design and technological mediation, which can improve our actions and disclose new features of the lifeworld, the project, like any ethical project, is limited through the human experience of tragedy. The limit that enables technological appropriation also marks the fallibility or uncertainty of particular technological designs and solutions to living problems and traumas. Also, Galloway highlights the fact that

the *practical* thrust of the interface (its inconsistencies) can potentially lead to a liberating “politics of incoherence”; but, more often than not, the unworkability of the interface seems to reinforce coherent political regimes and lead to what Deleuze calls “control societies”. The practical, engaging and indeterminate features of the interface can produce *ludic economies* - endless options for a play that appears as ‘free’ but which is actually circumscribed by a consistent, ideological politics.

The question arises then, as to the possibility of finding a middle position between these two approaches, one that could recognise both the *practical*, localized features of technologies and the more general features that hermeneutic approaches are critical of. Ricoeur’s concepts of distanciation and appropriation can help us achieve this. The task, I argue, is a hermeneutic one. It involves first recognising the hermeneutic circle that persists between technologies and practical understandings, and then, following Heidegger’s famous claim, “what is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way.”¹⁰⁷

In this spirit, the first part of this chapter will examine Gilbert Simondon’s claim that to grasp the distinctiveness of *technics*, our everyday prejudices against it must be challenged. This approach demands that a hermeneutic *suspicion* of technology needs, instead, to be turned toward the way we interact with technologies, rather than towards the transcendental structures of technology itself. Following Simondon, I suggest that, like a text, technologies are *distanced* from the world of practice (as a hermeneutic of suspicion suggests) yet, as with the activity of reading, it is possible to appropriate this distance at the regional, practical level. Ricoeur’s understanding of appropriation entails a double movement - the naïve understanding of an ego is replaced with an enlarged self-understanding, and the meaning of the text is also augmented and developed further through being repeated anew in different contexts. The distanciation-appropriation model of interpretative interaction outlined by Ricoeur’s philosophy allows us to read the relationship between human understanding and technologies as co-determining, provided that we recognise the *incomplete* and unstable nature of technological design. A step towards seeing the incomplete, fragile nature of technology can be achieved once we recognise its mirror in hermeneutic consciousness. If, according to Ricoeur, hermeneutic consciousness proceeds as a ‘spiral’, with our understandings of ourselves and others perpetually open to augmentation and revision through self-alienation, then we must accept, firstly, that our

¹⁰⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Blackwell Publishing, 1962), 195.

understandings of technology are subject to similar revisions in the case of new encounters, and, more importantly, that technologies, as the product of acting, thinking beings is *reflective* of the same questions that shape and condition this uncertain, incomplete consciousness. For Simondon, *technics* depends, in its becoming, on human ‘operators’ to engage with its structures and draw out new possible configurations through innovations and inventions. Whereas Simondon helps us to understand how *technics* depends on this process in its actualizations, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics helps us see how an acting self can be also be conceived of as an integral part of the operation, since Ricoeur’s understanding of the situated, vulnerable self avoids the forms of ‘humanism’ that Simondon views as a threat to technology.

The second part of the chapter expands on this image of a productive interaction between *technics* and the self by highlighting further the hermeneutic character of the interaction. Ricoeur’s understanding of ‘play’, adopted from Gadamer, helps us to conceive the interactive relation between practical reason and technological configurations as one in which prior identities (ego identities on the part of the human, and ‘intentionality’ or univocal function on the part of a technology) are bracketed. This bracketing allows for the emergence of the implicit horizons of both the technologies and the human to be brought to the fore and transformed through one another. Play allows for the possibility of a recognition of the *symbolic* aspect of technology, i.e., its ambiguous or multistable features that are celebrated in postphenomenological thought. A hermeneutic approach, however, must go further than this due to its inherent suspicion of technological rationality. As Verbeek has shown, a recognition of the multistability of the device can lead to better informed, more ‘moral’ design practices. However, a key part of the hermeneutic task, revealed through the experience of interpretation and appropriation, is in attesting to the fragility and finitude of understanding. I suggest that recognising the symbolic features of technologies can lead to such an attestation. If hermeneutics always entails a double movement of suspicion and trust, then the counterpart of a hermeneutic critique of technology can be found in recognising the symbolic aspects of technology through play.

7.1 THE WORLD OF THE TEXT AND THE ASSOCIATED *MILIEU* OF TECHNOLOGY

Simondon's work is useful for characterizing the *world* of technics and its difference and integrity in relation to the world of human, practical concerns.¹⁰⁸ Like the world of the text in the case of Ricoeur, the 'world' of the technical object is an *autonomous* one. Similar to Iser's retrieval of the *parasitic* nature of fiction in relation to ordinary language, the technical object has a parasitic relation to practice – it does not directly 'respond' to practical dilemmas (these, in fact, are *constraints* on technical evolution), rather, it has its own internal commitments or logics. As with Ricoeur's account of psychoanalytic techniques, the technical object is formed through relations of *force* as opposed to *meaning* (for example, the laws of physics, thermodynamics, etc.). Nevertheless, features of the technical object are still *intelligible* and meaningful in relation to human practical understanding, since the technical object has a transformative effect on the lifeworld through the emergence of new sets of relations and variables that correspond to concrete technical ensembles (the "associated milieus" of concrete technologies). Like the work of fiction, this *distanciation* of technologies from practices enables the creative production of *imaginative variations* on established understandings.

One of the crucial, and most lasting, aspects of Simondon's analysis of the technical object is the *emancipatory* character of his reading. His explanations of technics are a critical attempt to transform our everyday attitudes towards modern technologies,

Culture behaves toward the technical object much in the same way as a man caught up in primitive xenophobia behaves towards a stranger . . . The alienation in question is not caused by the machine but by a failure to come to an understanding of the nature and essence of the machine, by the absence of the machine from the world of meanings, and by its omission from the table of values and concepts that are an integral part of culture.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Simondon's term *technics* (*les techniques*) should be distinguished from the term *technology*, "which remains programmatic in Simondon's text". The term is translated into English as *technics* to reflect the specialized nature of the subject matter. As the translators of *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* write, technics means "the theory or study of industry and of the mechanical arts; while this term, as a collective plural used in the singular along the same lines as "physics," is usually a near synonym to "technology" and is differentiated in English from "technique" insofar as the latter refers to the almost ineffably practical and particular application of technics to a given concrete task, in French the singular "la technique" and the plural "les techniques" cover together the meanings covered both by "technique" or "techniques" in English and by "technics", and so the word "technics" as it appears in this text accordingly covers both." , Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove (Univocal, 2016), 9, fn. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, translated by Ninian Mellamphy (University of West Ontario, 1980), 1-2.

Against an elevated ‘humanism’ that treats machines and technologies as inert tools that carry out the human or social projects more efficiently, on the one hand, and an unjustified fear of the ‘automated’, world-threatening nature of the machine, on the other, Simondon asserts that these ideological positions blind us from properly understanding the nature of technics. To emancipate the human from these self-defeating perspectives, it is important to think about technologies in terms of their *becoming*, which is at once independent from, and co-emergent with human life. Rather than seeing ourselves as either masters or slaves of technology, we should see ourselves as collaborators with technological processes. This emancipatory perspective is paralleled in Ricoeur’s understanding of the text. The work of understanding, before considering the will or agency of the reader/participant (or author), embraces the long detour of reading and analysis. As with questions of the technical object, the ‘freedom’ of the reader is always relative to the work being considered. Like the text, technics encourages the development of an enlarged self, against a self that either asserts its dominance (by reducing technology to a tool), or disappears completely from the world (as would be the case in processes of enframing).

The convergence with the way Ricoeur and Iser discuss the activity of reading and the way Simondon discusses the becoming of technology is also found in their understandings of *concretization*. In the case of the act of reading, we saw that concretization was a productive process in which the horizons of the reader and horizons of the text were fused. The text has its own reality, independent of the concerns of the reader, meaning that the act of reading is not a simple assimilation of ideas or transmission of information. Instead, it is an active struggle, guided by cues from the text, the *répertoire* of the subjects engaging with the text, differing reading and composing strategies, and so on. All these mediating factors work to engender the fusion of horizons. The temporal nature of a text means that its objective character cannot be reduced to the subject-object distinction, but is an object that is constituted by the “wandering viewpoint”. A text cannot be abstracted from this wandering viewpoint and condensed into easily transmissible units of knowledge or information. All these factors render the reading process a process of concretization. The text, as a communicative medium, only *takes effect in existence*, through this process of (re)configuration by the reader. Prior to the reading process, the worlds of the text are only ‘proposed worlds’ or potential worlds.

In the preface to *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, John Hart writes that Simondon’s term *concrétude* is difficult to render in English, with the closest possible terms

being concretization or concrescence. However, he does offer a useful image, taken from M. C. Richards, to explain the idea of machine ‘concrétude’.¹¹⁰ The crafts (in this case, pottery), offer a suitable mode of practice for thinking about the relation between function and meaning in relation to making. When crafting an object, strong coordination is required between an understanding of the meaning of the object and the corporeal gestures and activities required to bring about that intended form. A necessary symmetry needs to be established between the two – it is not enough to simply have the intended form ‘in mind’ without the habitual knowledge of how to achieve it, and similarly it is not enough to know how to perform certain actions without understanding their purpose. These factors are drawn on by Richards in her book on centring, “It is the assertion by Richards of the inconvertible strength and symmetry of the combination which makes her combination of pottery and writing so important. Her concept of centering and fusion in the potter’s craft has the best chance of providing a language for machine ‘concrétude’ in Simondon.”¹¹¹

Technological becoming or concretization follows a similar process of centring: internal technical laws and the demands of natural milieus or particular technical ensembles are in conflict with one another, but the negotiation of this conflict is central to the concretization process. Similar to the part-whole relation in hermeneutics, the ‘technical object’ (the whole) is realized through concrete instances which differentiate it, just as individual machines are made up different parts working together. Unlike, Borgmann who suggests that the parts of machines or devices can all be reduced to the overall functionality or purpose of the device (and therefore can be swapped-out, altered, improved, etc., without changing the overall purpose), Simondon’s approach suggests that individual parts of a concrete technical object all have their own heterogeneous functions that are coordinated as a working whole. Altering a single part introduces a new set of functions to be integrated, and this process is not straightforward. The new functions introduced by individual parts can reveal new possibilities for the whole, provoking radical transformations of the functioning of the machine. Therefore, in Simondon’s case there is a perpetual tension between the parts of the machine and the overall function or purpose of the machine, which makes concretization a dynamic, recursive process.

¹¹⁰ M. C. Richards, *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962).

¹¹¹ John Hart, “Preface”, in Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, xvi.

So, concretization is understood in terms of a *fusion* – the coordinated integration of different systems or horizons into a new configuration. This is why, for Simondon, it is incorrect to think about technology in terms of *production*. It is not a ‘tool’ or process designed to produce a particular outcome or artefact. If something is produced, it is the tangential result of a concretization process. The fusion of various converging series of technical processes *gives rise to* utilizable outcomes (or may not). The point is that it is firstly the internal dynamics of the technical object that generate the concretization, rather than, for example, the ‘needs’ of a society, “It is not the production-line which produces standardization; rather it is intrinsic standardization which makes the production line possible.”¹¹² It seems here that Simondon is arguing for a *poietic* account of technics, as a way of resisting the temptation to view it as simply ‘productive’, in the economic sense.

For a user of a technology, understanding its meaning can be difficult, since its genesis is more the result of a series of technical innovations, immanent to the technical object, rather than being related directly to its use in the lifeworld. For example, a technological configuration, such as the petrol engine, can be applied in a variety of different contexts (lawnmowers, boats, cars, etc.), and therefore its meaning is not exhausted by any one of these particular applications. For this reason, an examination of the *utility* of a technology does not yield a better understanding of its function or purpose,

We can get the same result from very different functionings and structures: steam-engines, petrol-engines, turbines, and engines powered by springs and weights are all engines; yet, for all that, there is a more apt analogy between a spring-engine and a bow or cross-bow than between the former and a steam-engine; a clock with weights has an engine analogous to a windlass, while an electric clock is analogous to a house-bell or buzzer. Usage brings together heterogeneous structures and functions in genres and species which get their meaning from the relationship between their particular functions and another function, that of the human being in action.¹¹³

For Simondon, the *individuality* of a concrete technology can only be explained by recourse to a specific form of analysis. The meaning of particular technologies cannot be discerned through events of usage, but through a reflective or explanatory account of the inner workings of the technology itself. In the above quote, the (social/practical) category “engine” does not account for the different configurations that make up various species of engine, and that lend them their individual quality. In other words, if we wish to understand the essence of a technical object,

¹¹² Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 17.

¹¹³ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 11-12.

practice or practical usage is the wrong point with which to begin. Rather than analysing how a technology is utilized in determining its meaning, Simon suggests instead a more genealogical approach – technologies move from abstract models to concrete unities. ‘Artisanal’ techniques, for example, are seen to be more abstract. They depend on the coordinated influence of a number of external factors. They are more likely to be individuated by ‘chance’ elements; perhaps an artefact is made-to-order, supply of certain materials is low so others are substituted, and so on. In short, abstract technologies depend on *practical compromises* in their functioning. A technology becomes concrete through an internal process of integration, which, in a sense, negates the need for environmental compromises. In Aristotle’s terms, *techne* loves *tyche* – the genesis of the technical object involves a struggle with chance or non-controllable elements in the process of developing its own self-sufficient form. For example, in relation to the technical configuration of an engine:

It could be said that the modern engine is a concrete engine and that the old engine was abstract. In the old engine each element comes into play at a certain moment in the cycle and, then, it is supposed to have no effect on the other elements; the different parts of the engine are like individuals who could be thought of as working each in his turn without their ever knowing each other...the integration of the particular unit into the ensemble involves a series of problems to be resolved, problems that are called technical but which, in fact, are problems concerning the compatibility of already given ensembles.¹¹⁴

The more fragmented a technological ensemble is, the more abstract and vulnerable it is. A concrete technology is one with a high level of coordination and integration. The ‘technical’ problem involving the convergence of different structures into an integrated whole, is distinguished from the ‘practical’ problem of finding compromises and partial solutions for incomplete technologies,

Therefore, the technical problem has to do with the convergence of structures in to a structural unity rather than with the seeking of compromises between conflicting requirements...It is such a convergence that gives the technical object its specific identity because, at any given time, an indefinite plurality of functional systems is not possible. Technical species are a great deal more restricted in number than the destined uses of technical objects. Human needs diversity to infinity, but directions of convergence for technical species are finite in number.¹¹⁵

In hermeneutic terms, the “specific identity” of individual technologies is related to their *horizon* – their internal, concrete configurations already have a historical meaning. Their past innovations and constructions, which they have negotiated and integrated on the way to

¹¹⁴ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 14.

¹¹⁵ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 15-16.

becoming more concrete, now shape and determine their future possible innovations. Concrete technologies are also *finite*. In Gadamer's terms, they are subject to their own *history of effects*. Like a text they have an *autonomous* nature, the *internal meaning* of technology is the source of its genesis and resulting concreteness, as opposed to its *significance* (human significance). For example, the automobile is a revolutionary technological innovation from a social perspective, yet its emergence was the product of a practical *compromise* between the "technical species" and the nature of the human operator,

The more a car must meet the critical needs of its user the more its essential functions are encumbered by an external bondage. The body-work becomes loaded with accessories and the shape no longer approximates a stream-lined structure. The made-to-measure feature is not only inessential, it works against the essence of the technical being, like a dead weight imposed from without. The car's centre of gravity is raised, and bulk increased.¹¹⁶

Simondon's work parallels that of Simpson and Borgmann to an extent. Technologies and practices are seen to be in conflict with one another. However, as an inversion of the earlier perspective offered by Simpson and Borgmann, Simondon sees social/practical compromises as threatening to the evolution of technologies, rather than *vice versa*. Instead of seeing technologies being nihilistic modes of representing (enframing) practices, practices are seen to anticipate and represent technological innovations in ways which stifle the individuation process of a technological species, human needs and desires tend to render *inessential* features of technologies more significant. From Simondon's perspective, there seems to be an irresolvable conflict between practical understanding, taken in a humanist sense, and technological becoming. Concrete technologies are akin to biological entities, they possess their own individualities and structures. The office plant and the computer could be said to be analogous in this sense; both are individuated phenomena that have been abstracted in order to enhance a practical working environment.

However, Simondon does offer a solution to this conflict. We must abandon our 'humanist' pretensions and embrace a new mode of the human that is a collaborator with technologies. Whereas the 'essence' of a technical species has its own internal tendency, and therefore has an integrity resembling that of natural phenomena, its becoming is also a process laden with affective consequences, and these consequences can indeed be felt at the practical level. Concrete technologies produce *associated milieus*. When Ricoeur asserts the integrity and

¹¹⁶ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 18.

autonomous nature of the text, he does so in order to accentuate its *worldly* character – a world which is at once distanced and inviting. The same can be said of Simondon's reading of technologies. For hermeneutics, the notion of an enlarged self entails the crucial factor of *transformation* – the act of reading is a concretization because its effects *alter* self-understanding in a way that is irreversible. We do not simply approach a text or narrative with the intention of fulfilling our own needs or desires, instead, we expect to feel our desires and outlooks challenged by the world of the text. The expectations of the reader, and the challenges presented by the world of the text, are transformed into a new, inseparable, configuration embodied in the enlarged self. Whereas technologies are in conflict with practices, their associated milieus offer points of engagement and transformation. A technology that 'fits in' well with an already on-going practice, for example a technique employed by an artisan, has less of an effect on established practices than a fully-formed concrete technology that demands to be taken on its own terms.

The reason technologies produce associated milieus is because, in the process of becoming more concrete, technologies must *adapt* to the surrounding environment. Much of this adaptation process is impacted by human operators, "The technical object is delimited to a certain extent by human choice which tries to establish the best compromise possible between two worlds."¹¹⁷ However, adaptation must be taken in a particular sense. It does not mean that there is already a fully-formed environment in which the technology must carve out its own niche. Rather, adaptation is a type of recursive activity, where the environment is also *produced*, retroactively, by the adaptation process, "The adaptation-concretization process is one which causes the birth of an environment rather than being the result of an already established environment."¹¹⁸ In other words, technologies both find a place within an ongoing milieu, whilst at the same time inaugurating new connections and values which also affect the shape of this milieu. The individuation of a technical object is effected by this adaptation process, "such individuation is possible because of the recurrence of causality in the environment which the technical being creates around itself, and environment which it influences and by which it is influenced. This environment, which is at the same time natural and technical, can be called the associated milieu."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 54.

¹¹⁸ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 58.

¹¹⁹ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 60-61.

The associated milieu, which is a mixture of the environmental and the technical, must be distinguished from the practical environment of the human agent. Simondon asserts the circularity (recursivity) of the adaptation process because he wants to highlight that the associated milieu of the technical object is not a *fabricated* milieu. The relationship between a world and the technical object is one of mutual dependence. The technical object has, in Canguilhem's terms, a *vital value*.¹²⁰ Again, it must be acknowledged that there is a difference between an abstract and a concrete technical object, but a concrete technology is one which is integrated into a milieu, and this integration entails a selection process. Certain features of the environment which are favourable to the development of the technology are highlighted, or in hermeneutic terms, disclosed, by its concrete existence.

Can these selections become meaningful for human practices? Perhaps they do not give themselves up easily to interpretation. More may be 'disclosed' to the existing human being by dwelling by a river bank among the large pillar-like trees, than explicating the fluid mechanics of the hydroelectric dam which lies further down the river. In other words, there remains something 'other' in technical evolution, it has its own logic and development process, which is not concerned with the vital values of the 'human' (beyond the human-as-operator). However, if, taking Simpson's view of meaning discussed earlier, meaning is a *condition* of practice, rather than a value to be extracted from the practice, then it may be possible to view the associated milieus of technologies as important for considering how practical conditions shift alongside the evolution of technologies. Taking Simondon's view of technical evolution seriously, means accepting that the formation of associated milieus is an *inhuman* operation. The worlds conditioned by technological adaptations are worlds we arrive in as others, and which must be approached through an attitude of engagement and discovery. Technological associated milieus are not comforting, familiar worlds, fabricated for our own benefit, instead, they are disruptive and foreign. In this way, approaching concrete technologies is akin to approaching a text, it involves the demand to alienate oneself from one's own assumptions about technology.

7.2 EMANCIPATION THROUGH APPROPRIATION

The concrete nature of technologies suggests that they can potentially be thought of as hermeneutic objects. Simondon's work highlights that individual technologies possess their

¹²⁰ Georges Canguilhem, *La connaissance de la vie* (Vrin: Paris, 1992).

own horizons and internal meanings that can be disclosed by combining an analysis of their technical features with a genealogy of their past iterations. At the practical level, the associated milieus of technologies help shape what counts as valuable in the lifeworld. I have suggested that Simondon's account of the technical object shares some features of Ricoeur's understanding of distanced structures; both have an autonomous existence; their *meaning* is something contained within the configuration or *work* itself rather than in the 'minds' of the users engaging with or producing these structures. However, whereas texts, narratives, linguistic structures, and so on, are hermeneutic because they repeat personal, historical or cultural concerns, the technical object seems to offer no place for the human self. Therefore, if hermeneutics centres on ideas of *Bildung*, including Ricoeur's directing of his hermeneutics towards the task of understanding *better*, what do we *learn* about ourselves from engagements with technologies? Simondon's answer to this question involves the overcoming of social prejudices about technology and liberating ourselves from a humanist conception of our existence and nature. I suggest that Ricoeur's work, too, allows the possibility for thinking about the productive effect of technology on self-understanding, provided that a difference is retained between techniques and practical understanding.

What we learn through appropriating these complex, foreign, and *incomplete* configurations is a lesson about human freedom. As David Lewin argued, this is the guiding question of a technological epoch. However, whereas Lewin suggested that technology reveals the question of freedom and self-determination in a negative way by displacing the question, below I will re-read this displacement as a potential opening or opportunity to put our assumptions *in play*. Through technological engagement, the apparent freedom of an ego is replaced by the playful (free) interactions of structures and self-understanding. A *literal* engagement with technology must be overcome for this approach to become operative. A literal engagement is one that disavows the *symbolic* features of technology.

Within the context of our everyday interactions with technologies, devices and systems appear initially through their *utility*. In this sense, technologies do not address us or invite a free participation in the same way as an artwork or text. The utility of technology is linked to what Borgmann calls the "tightly-patterned network" of technologies – devices exist within a network or configuration which progressively aims towards fulfilling a certain *promise* (making resources more available with increased efficiency, producing higher levels of comfort, reducing risk, etc.), and in this sense individual devices are *substitutable*. In this way,

no particular device exists only within a concrete context. As we saw, for Ricoeur linguistic understanding is predicated on an inseparable relation between language-systems and the symbol, i.e., the point at which a language system can be traced back to its origins in the lifeworld, as a feature of a particular historical tradition or an existential insight about sacred being-in-the-world. The inseparability of context and mediating structure seems to be absent in technologies according to the hermeneutic critique.

From this perspective, technology does not address us as vulnerable, capable agents, in the same way that the symbol ‘calls out’ to us and implicates us. Whereas entering into a dialogical interaction with an artwork or text can be seen as a voluntary act (even if it is a voluntary submission to the message of the work), the utility and substitutability of technological artefacts means that we can neither enter into dialogue with them, nor simply walk away (as we could in the case of a painting). For example, in the run-up to a recent U.S. Supreme Court case regarding the question of whether or not the tracking data for your mobile phone should be considered as ‘private’ and therefore as protected under the Fourth Amendment, the magazine *Wired* featured an article with the title “Supreme Court Must Understand: Cell Phones Aren’t Optional”.¹²¹ In the article the authors write:

The problem is that cell phones are no longer meaningfully voluntary in modern society. They have become central to society’s basic functions, such as employment, public safety, and government services. The cell phone is a revolutionary technology, but its real value comes not from its technical capabilities, but from its near-universal adoption.¹²²

This description of mobile phone technology mirrors Lewin’s analysis of the logic of the interface – the technology ‘behind’ it is “revolutionary”, but these “technical capabilities” are circumscribed by the *utility* of the device. Furthermore, as with Lewin’s analysis of the interface, the *utility* of the mobile phone actively denies the deliberative freedom of its users - we do not even have a choice as to whether to use one or not.

The authors of the *Wired* article identify the *value* of technology with its social effects. A hermeneutic account, on the other hand, should not stop at this ‘literal’ level. If we want to read technologies as symbolic, the literal, or ‘sign’ value of the mobile phone needs to be read in

¹²¹ Andrew D. Selbst and Julia Ticona, “Supreme Court Must Understand: Cell Phones Aren’t Optional”, *Wired* 11.29.17. Accessed January 7 2018. <https://www.wired.com/story/supreme-court-must-understand-cell-phones-arent-optional/>.

¹²² Selbst and Ticona, “Cell Phones Aren’t Optional”

relation to what the authors identify as the broader *capability* of the device. As we saw, Ricoeur's understanding of the symbol, the point at which hermeneutics begins, asserts that sign-structures operate in relation to a concealed symbolic (ambiguous) substratum. Interpretation is a work that aims to reactivate and renew these symbolic features by putting them into play in new ways (appropriation). In this case, the technological capability of the mobile phone, which exceeds its use within a utility-driven configuration, is the symbolic dimension of the phone. This symbolic meaning cannot be separated from its effects within a particular economy of use, but it nevertheless exceeds these effects and remains open to different interpretations and uses.

Ricoeur himself articulates this tension, between hegemonic utilizations of technology and a recognition of the alternative possibilities concealed by this utility, "[T]he modern praxis most caught up in technology presupposes a prior agreement about the possibilities and norms of what is taken to be a meaningful being-in-the-world. Tradition is both the bond and the setting for this understanding."¹²³ The hermeneutic task lies in revealing this dependency on tradition and history, so that new possibilities and futures can emerge.

The hermeneutic suspicion of technology succeeds in acknowledging a dimension of technology neglected by Simondon – its tendency to mask or conceal itself. The unmasking of technology can occur by appealing to its symbolic rootedness in praxis. Both a critique or suspicion of the broader network or paradigm of technological effects, and an attestation of the indeterminate, inventive, world of *technics* concealed by these effects overlap in articulating a *limit* of technology – from the critical hermeneutic perspective the limit is representative of technology's impracticality, while for Simondon the limit is an enabling limit which constitutes technics as a *world*. The key here is that the limit, on both accounts, opens up a space for practical wisdom to operate. Either practical wisdom is left to take over where technologies fail, or, it acts as an 'operator' – it negotiates compromises between the demands of the technical object and the societal or cultural demands.

Utilizing aspects of Ricoeur's work explored so far, I suggest that this limit should be conceived as a *horizon*, across which appropriation occurs. The horizon of technology is found in its practical applications. In keeping with a hermeneutic account of a horizon, it is not a fixed, graspable point. Instead, it is a projection of a field of possibilities which are variable

¹²³ Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutical logic?" in *Hermeneutics: Writings and Lectures*, trans. D. Pellauer (Polity: 2013), 85.

and uncertain, and which imply the perspective of a subject or individual. Throughout Section 4 I have discussed various way that this horizon is visible, in terms of the multistability of the device, the presentational features of the interface, and the associated milieus of technical objects. The thinkers who articulate these perspectives also emphasize the role that *practical understanding* plays in the negotiation of these horizons.

Engaging with technologies at the level of presentation is different than a direct examination or critique of the technical object or tendency itself. Participating in technological presentation, both in a critical and appropriating way, permits a fusion of horizons to emerge between a technical tendency and practical understanding. Crucially, this mode of enagement leaves *both* sides open and vulnerable. Practical participation in technological milieus does not answer the question of what technology *is* or may become, but is aimed, inversely, at keeping this question open.

7.2.1 PLAY: TRANSFORMATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY

The hermeneutic account of the way that this fusion occurs is through *play*. Play transforms literal, everyday interactions into indeterminate, symbolic structures of representation. It actualises the surplus of meaning present within every configuration or work. For Brenda Laurel, this is what the interface does in relation to the computer. Whereas, from a certain perspective, the processes of a computer can be reduced to their logical, programmatic operations, the supplement of the interface translates these operations into a new mode of presentation. According to hermeneutic theory, this activity of representing has broader implications beyond the purely pragmatic questions of user experience. If we conceive the activity of the interface as a dynamic, effect-producing practical form of presentation, as Laurel and Galloway do, then interactions with interfaces can be thought in terms of play. Using the resources of hermeneutics, we can read this activity as one that *transforms* our understanding of technology. Furthermore, Gadamer's account of play, integral to Ricoeur's understanding of appropriation, suggests that the activity of play not only transforms self-understanding, but transforms the object that we are engaging with by disclosing new futures and possibilities of application.

When discussing representation, Gadamer makes a distinction between a sign, a symbol, and the picture (*Bild*). The sign (pure indication, *Verweisung*) is defined through its functionality, it serves as an *indication* (of what is absent). For example, a road-sign indicating an upcoming

curve, or a bookmark, serving to indicate a particular page.¹²⁴ The symbol (pure substitution, *Vertreten*) stands at the other end of the scale, it represents something, but does so to such an extent that the ‘original’ becomes unnecessary.¹²⁵ For example, a crucifix. In the object or image of a crucifix, the thing being represented is already fully present in the object or image itself. This aspect of symbols is also what allows them to become “institutional”. The picture stands between these two representational modes, it both points (indicates) beyond itself, toward some absent thing, but also *belongs* to the absent thing; its existence augments the thing it represents, “The difference between a picture and a sign has an ontological basis. The picture does not disappear in pointing to something else but, in its own being, shares in what it represents.”¹²⁶ Gadamer’s example here is of landscape painting. It is by virtue of the existence of the landscape painting we begin to see a landscape as ‘picturesque’, “It is only through the picture (Bild) that the original (Urbild) becomes original (Ur-bild: also, ur-picture) – e.g., it is only by being pictured that a landscape becomes picturesque.”¹²⁷ Therefore, with pictures there is an ontological connection between a representation and the thing that is absent in the representation. Ricoeur’s concept of *représentance* is similar to this notion of the picture.¹²⁸ As a stand-in for something absent, a picture or *représentance* highlights the mediating and active character of representations. For Ricoeur, these kinds of representations, for example a historical trace, also call out for an appropriation that would attest to the impossible recovery of the ‘original’ thing or event that is being mediated.

Gadamer’s outline of the “picture” leads to the idea that ‘aesthetic differentiation’ is always secondary (an abstraction), that is, the idea of ‘art-in-itself’ is misleading, because a real work of art always belongs to a world. For Gadamer, the best example of this is architecture. A well-designed building is not only aesthetically pleasing in its own right, but it demands to be appreciated within a particular context. It cannot ‘stick out’ on the landscape, etc. Therefore, architecture combines aesthetic considerations with practical wisdom, there is always a problem-set beyond the aesthetic (coming from the world itself) which contributes to the formation of a building. The final product, the building, both mirrors its surroundings (in that they provided the framework or constraints on design), whilst also augmenting or enhancing

¹²⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 146.

¹²⁵ This use of the term “symbol” is different than Ricoeur’s use that discussed in earlier chapters.

¹²⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 146.

¹²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 136.

¹²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 565, fn. 81

its surroundings by introducing something new into its appearance, “We call a successful building a ‘happy solution,’ and mean by this both that it perfectly fulfils its purpose and that its construction has added something new to the spatial dimensions of a town or landscape. Through this dual ordering the building presents a true increase of being: it is a work of art.”¹²⁹

Where would we situate the interface on this scale? For Lewin, it certainly would be viewed as a network of signs/indications. It represents in a mode where there is no connection between what is absent (a series of computational operations, for example) and what is present (the icon we click on to perform these operations). The “unworkability” of the interface, on the other hand, may bring it closer to symbolic modes of representation; the interface becomes caught in endlessly recurring loops of representation without ever participating meaningfully in the content being mediated. Laurel's perspective seems to bring it closest to the idea of interface-as-picture - designers are seen as playing a crucial role in bridging practical and aesthetic concerns. Like an architect who must consider many practical factors, software and interface designers must be aware of the capacities of the machine and the aesthetic concerns of the person operating the machine and, in this way, there is a concordance between the performative and the practical.

The aim of both hermeneutic concepts, of a picture (*Bild*) and *représentance*, is to respond to the tradition of philosophical understandings of representation in a productive way. What is retained is a phenomenological understanding of *intentionality* – a representative medium does stand-for or intend towards some actual object or theme. However, the caveat is that this intentionality remains *unfulfilled*. Therefore, a representation is bound by the content against which it stands, whilst at the same time remaining different. Through this difference it is capable of producing imaginative variations on the thing it is representing, which in turn feed back into our understanding of the thing, allowing us to both see a resemblance between a representation and the subject of that representation, as well as a variation which enables us to see the original in a new way. This logic was discussed earlier in Chapter 4, where the distance of a narrative representation is refigured by Ricoeur as a *productive* distance. For example, in relation to history, narrative understandings allow us to both attest to the historical existence of an event, whilst also integrating this event into our own horizon of understanding, “Although

¹²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 149.

the event cannot be a mere ‘referent,’ it can be an ‘ultimate’ one and although it is not the ‘object’ of a narrative account, it can be the ‘counterpart’ of *Gegenüber* of such a narrative.”¹³⁰

For Gadamer, the difference of representation is pushed further. A representation does not only belong to its referent by way of comparison or similarity, rather, its existence *transforms* the original. Whereas Ricoeur speaks of an enlarged self-understanding brought about by an encounter with a text, for Gadamer self-understanding is radically transformed. For Gadamer, the play of presentation is closer to the unworkability of the interface; it is a mode of engagement in which the subject matter being engaged with is produced through the rules or terms of participation rather than through reference to an already existing subject matter. In “play”, the subject (reader, author, etc.) ceases to retain their “identity”, and instead acts as a participant within a larger whole, “play itself is a transformation of such a kind that the identity of the player does not continue to exist for anybody. Everybody asks instead what is supposed to be represented, what is “meant.” The players (or playwright) no longer exist, only what they are playing.”¹³¹ Participation in play does not result in an “altered” self-understanding, but a transformed one,

In terms of the categories, all alteration (*alloiosis*) belongs in the sphere of quality – i.e., of an accident in substance. But transformation means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else. . . . Transformation into structure is not simply transposition into another world. Certainly the play takes place in another, closed world. But inasmuch as it is a structure, it is, so to speak, its own measure and measure itself by nothing outside it.¹³²

The endless variations on the structures of play belong to this “closed” world itself, rather than to the subjectivities of the performers enacting the play. Gadamer stresses that the “world” of play is not an imaginary or “suspended” world, rather, it is even more *truthful* than “everyday” reality (“modern” reality that is regimented, and devoid of play), since truth is an emergent phenomenon that occurs through the play of structures, “The concept of transformation characterizes the independence and superior mode of being of what we called structure. From

¹³⁰ Pol Vanderveelde, “The Enigma of the Past: Ricoeur’s Theory of Narrative as a Response to Heidegger”, in S. Davidson and M. A. Vallée (eds.) *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur* (Springer International Publishing, 2016), 128.

¹³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 111.

¹³² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 111.

this viewpoint ‘reality’ is defined as what is untransformed, and art as the raising up (Aufhebung) of this reality into its truth.”¹³³

Following the examples in the previous chapter, the technical reality of the computer is put into play, or ‘presented’, via the interface and the various forms of application. As Lewin pointed out, there is a difference or concealment that takes place in the translation between the logic of the machine and its presentation in representational forms (interfaces). As I have been arguing, this concealment can be read in a positive sense, since this new form of presentation *invites participation*. It introduces a ‘user’ or ‘player’ into the technological process. As Simondon noted, the technical object has its own integrity or tendency, but the evolution of the interface, as a distinct but related technological phenomenon, suggests that practical manifestations of this tendency are crucial in the evolution of technologies. The reality of technology, in absence of its presentation (concretization) remains abstract and untransformed. For Gadamer, too, the reality of the world of the work requires playful participation in order to be brought into existence,

Without being imitated in the work, the world does not exist as it exists in the work. It is not there as it is there in the work, and without being reproduced, the work is not there. Hence, in presentation, the presence of what is presented reaches its consummation. . . . Every such presentation is an ontological event and occupies the same ontological level as what is represented. By being presented it experiences, as it were, an *increase in being*. The content of the picture itself is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original.¹³⁴

Our everyday interactions with technologies, guided by the logic of signs (the utopia of functionality), is an ordered, non-playful mode in interacting with technology. It does nothing to further our understanding of what technology *is*. Instead, it conceals this question. Not only are our practical understandings of the world threatened, as the hermeneutic critique suggests, but our practical understandings of *technologies* themselves is threatened. In relation to the above quote, an everyday, non-playful interaction suggests to us that the “world [of technics] does not exist”, since it is only through playful presentation, which itself mirrors the dynamic nature of the technical object, that technics can be expressed and engaged with.

In terms of the practice-technique relationship, when a practitioner engages with a new technology, their prior identity is threatened. To return to the example utilized by both Simpson

¹³³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 112.

¹³⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 133-135.

and Borgmann, with the introduction of the microwave, the family becomes alienated from the practice of the “family dinner”. Whereas the structure of the family dinner was potentially a flexible one that allowed for play and variation, the design of the microwave encourages participants to engage with it in a non-playful manner, nothing is transformed or revealed through this interaction. However, in the case of Verbeek’s example, the ultrasound scan, it is easier to trace the practical transformations that occur by the introduction of a new mode of presentation. Unanticipated questions emerge for the actors involved in the pregnancy, and the presence of the new technology dissolves old modes of practice and inaugurates new relations. The process involves a mutual agreement; in order for the technology to take effect, participants have to willingly engage in the rules of play, and in order for a self to become enlarged, it must submit itself to the new rules of engagement.

As the above quote by Gadamer highlights, modes of presentation that take effect in existence are, ontologically speaking, an *extension* or expansion of the thing that is being mediated (an “increase” in its being). It is through *engagement* with technological modes of presentation that the question concerning technology is expanded and left open. If we engage with technological artefacts in a non-playful, regimented way, the essence of technology appears as threatening and fixed. However, as technological designs and interfaces begin to embrace the uncertain space of application as a playful and meaningful space, the essence of technology is put into question. Individual technologies, whose modes of presentation are constantly being differentiated and reconfigured, can be seen to extend the question of the meaning of technology. The practical accounts of technology presented throughout this section attest to the variable, playful nature of technological devices and interfaces.

7.2.2 PLAY: TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE SELF

On the one hand, recognising the productive horizons of individual technologies and technological solutions leads to a disclosing of the symbolic or ambiguous features of technologies, allowing us to develop unanticipated practices around them. On the other hand, a recognition of this limit also brings into view the question of the kind of *self* who engages with technology in this way. Ricoeur’s embracing of explanatory and critical methods is predicated on the assumption that an intimate connection persists between a distanced perspective and our fundamental belonging to a world. In absence of a consideration of the self, technological *play* becomes an eternal recurrence of the same ‘ludic economy’; we may

succeed in generating new applications and designs but would end up becoming simply another part of the machine. When viewed from the perspective of practical self-understanding, on the other hand, an engagement with the indeterminate horizons of technology can become a productive moment in a recursive self-engagement. As discussed earlier, Ricoeur's notion of a 'spiral' of understanding, captured in Iser's account of the recursivity that persists between interpretations and *registers* of interpretation, claims that distanciation and belonging perpetually inform one another. Read according to this model, technologies and practices inform and challenge one another through constant development and revision. Generating more forms of technologies, encouraging the exploration of *ingenious* or novel technical solutions, is reflective of a deeper human concern to transform understanding through the activity of reflective distanciation. Technologies, as distanciated inventions, provide a means of both reflecting on the practical self, while at the same time creating new avenues for the self to explore. In short, it leads to an *enlargement* of the self.

Ricoeur's notion of the enlarged self is linked to appropriation. Just as Simondon replaces the figure of the human engineer or designer with the figure of the human *operator*, Ricoeur replaces the figure of the knowing, acting *subject*, with the figure of the shattered cogito – a mediated *self* who is at once vulnerable and capable. Although the discourse is different, both approaches eschew an 'elevated' humanism in favour of a participatory, mediated version of the human. Importantly, Ricoeur even suggests moving beyond the *intersubjective* framework, toward a framework which anticipates a lifeworld constituted not only by subjects but by *works* and language systems. The self before a work is no longer a reader in dialogue with the author, but a reader engaging with a work that possesses its own integrated meaning and functions,

The theory of appropriation which will now be sketched follows from the displacement undergone by the whole problematic of interpretation: it will be less an intersubjective relation of mutual understanding than a relation of apprehension applied to the world conveyed by the work. A new theory of subjectivity follows from this relation. In general we may say that appropriation is no longer to be understood in the tradition of philosophies of the subject, as a constitution of which the subject would possess the key. To understand is not to project oneself into the text; it is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Appropriation", in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 182.

If, along with Ricoeur, we conceive the subject as both constituting and constituted by works and interpretations, then characterizing individual technologies as exhibiting a *work*-like character allows us to see that ways that the self is implicated in the development of technology.

Ricoeur's understanding of the enlarged self, received through appropriation, aims to retain the *dual* nature of the self. For Ricoeur, the self can never be articulated as a totality, due to the *semantic dualism* that persists through discourses which deal with the 'objective' character of the self (its *idem* identity) and those which deal with the experiential or subjective character of the self (its *ipseity*).¹³⁶ As with Ricoeur's account of the explanation-understanding dialectic, the *self* for Ricoeur is distinguished from the subject because it encompasses both reflective and participatory features of its identity. The hermeneutic circle of appropriation "encompasses in its spiral both the apprehension of projected worlds and the advance of self-understanding in the presence of these new worlds."¹³⁷ A "fusion of horizons" between the technical object and human understanding, then, is not a convergence where one term disappears into the other, but a relation where the difference between both is retained. In order to maintain the difference, the *mode of being* of each side of the relation needs to be recognised according to its own terms.

The mode of being of the practicing self is related to its *ipseity*, or its "non-identical repetitions" in time. The mode of being of *technics*, according to Simondon, is related to the phenomena of concretization and the logic of the technical object. Both modes can be seen to presuppose and enrich each other in certain ways. The technical tendency runs parallel to the becoming of the self, both processes are understood as *tasks*. Ricoeur's understanding of *ipseity* presents a view of selfhood that captures both the differentiation of a self by language, works, communities, etc., and the integrative nature of this differentiation process. Similar to the technical object, the self tends towards enlargement, the assimilation of heterogeneous worlds and experiences into an integrated understanding, reflected in the capacity to attest. As Simondon notes, when it comes to the formation of concrete technical ensembles, differentiation and integration are two related processes,

It seems contradictory, surely, to affirm that the evolution of a technical object depends upon a process of differentiation (take for example, the command grid in the triode dividing into three grids in the pentode) and, at the same time, a process of concretization, with each structural element filling several functions instead of one.

¹³⁶ Jean-Pierre Changeux, and Paul Ricoeur, *What Makes Us Think? A Neuroscientist and a Philosopher Argue about Ethics, Human Nature, and the Brain*, 13-14.

¹³⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics", in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection & Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 178.

Differentiation is possible because this very differentiation makes it possible to integrate into the working of the whole.¹³⁸

Technological appropriation (concretization), and practical, hermeneutic appropriation, share a similar relation to the world. Although both remain distinct processes with their own individual sets of concerns or logics, technologies cannot exist wholly independently of human activity. Against cybernetic theories, Simondon asserts the *artificiality* of the technical object. Although much of Simondon's analysis involves drawing parallels between biological systems and technical systems, the crucial difference is that "The most that can be said about technical objects is that they tend towards concretization, whereas natural objects, as living beings, are concrete right from the beginning."¹³⁹ Similarly, human self-understanding becomes impoverished when devoid of external works and techniques, against which a partial self-understanding is perpetually built. Or, in Heidegger's terms, *Dasein* is a type of being that is in question, whose concreteness is determined as much by potentiality (what I may become) as by its being. *Dasein* also differs from "natural objects" in that, due to its historical nature, it is not concrete from the beginning. So, although distinct, practical self-understanding and technical objects, depend on one another in the process of becoming more concrete (which involves both integration and enlargement).

This, alternative, understanding of technics requires us to re-think key hermeneutic concepts. As was argued in Chapter 5, *phronēsis* and *techne* presuppose one another because of their mutual limitation; *techne* is limited in application, and practical understanding is limited due to the concealed possibilities for action that can only be revealed through *making*. This approach contrasts with that of Heidegger, for whom the temporality of action grounds human understanding in ways that theoretical knowledge (including, for Heidegger, *techne*) fails to do,

To see why *phronēsis* is the highest [for Heidegger], it is necessary to compare it to the other ways of uncovering. . . . *Technē* loses out because although it deals with things that can be otherwise, it does not concern *Dasein* itself; the producer does not consider himself while producing an object, but rather is absorbed in the production. Even if he steps back and regards himself technically as a worker, he has taken up one possibility of being without making explicit all of the possibilities he can be.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 27.

¹³⁹ Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 50.

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Ricky, *Revolutionary Saints: Heidegger, National Socialism, and Antinomian Politics* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002), 48.

However, if, with Ricoeur, we recognise the inseparability of action and text, or of action and the structures that mediate and project possibilities for action, then the type of production associated with technics (distanciated production) can be read as a way of closing down possibilities in order to open new ones. The “producer” who is “absorbed in the production” is indeed displaced from an immediate understanding of herself, yet this displacement is necessary for the “enlargement” of the self, through the re-appropriation of product into practical life. The producer is still *indirectly* concerned with themselves. This approach is driven by the centrality of *praxis*, as opposed to the centrality of *dwelling*. It favours active construction and creation over quietude. The self who is conditioned by both belonging and distanciation is revealed not by turning away from technics but by embracing it in a new, dependant way.

Technologies, due to their artificiality, are never fully *in* the world, they remain at a distance from it, like the text. In their applications, they depend on a practical attitude that recognizes and corresponds to their demands. Practices also depend on, or tend towards, reflective articulations of the pre-understandings that make up practice. These can take the form of writings, narratives, techniques, and so on. Technologies, when considered in their practical dimension (as forms of mediation) also serve as reflective representations of practices. For Verbeek, they enable practical transformations and re-orientations, a fact that can be harnessed to develop more *moral* technologies. For Galloway and Laurel, the aesthetics of the interface implicate human agents and can potentially instantiate corresponding practices. For Simondon, technics demands the transformation of an entire mode of social being – from passive consumers or users of technologies to active operators and collaborators in the co-becoming of technical and human reality.

Given that human understanding depends on the works that mediate and condition new possibilities for the growth of the self, and that technologies, in their artificiality, depend on a relation to the human in the process of integration, the self and technologies-as-works are mutually dependant on one another. In this way, appropriating technologies, in the productive sense, can also be a point of emancipation, as Simondon, suggests. An appropriation of technology, which comes following a reflective detour through an analysis of the technical object, can be a mode of transitioning from the naivety of the social attitude towards technology

that Simondon critiques, toward the ‘second naivety’ of a playful engagement with concrete technologies.

Whereas a *literal* engagement with technology can result in the production of a *utopia of functionality*, an interpretive *play* is aimed at moving beyond these familiar senses of technologies, towards a deeper understanding of the technical object and of the type of *self* implied by a confrontation with that object. For Ricoeur, this is the goal of appropriation. It aims to move beyond an apprehension of the immanent patterns of the work, toward an understanding of its features that transcend this immanence and address another:

So if we apply explanation to ‘sense’, as the immanent pattern of the work, then we can reserve interpretation for the sort of inquiry concerned with the *power of a work* to project a world of its own and to set in motion the hermeneutical circle, which encompasses in its spiral both the apprehension of projected worlds and the advance of self-understanding in the presence of these new worlds.¹⁴¹

Simondon’s alternative understanding of technics allows us to retain aspects of the hermeneutic critique, whilst enacting a revision. Technological worlds remain distinct from human, practical understanding and the practices that correspond to those understandings. However, the dynamic nature of technical structures in application means that, contrary to what is suggested by the hermeneutic critique, they remain open to appropriation at the practical level. In place of a critical investigation of the transcendental features of technology, a playful appropriation allows for the possibility of the critical attitude to become revised. Play, in Gadamer’s sense, and adopted by Ricoeur, is aimed at counteracting features of technology that hermeneutics is critical of, features which deny that variable, differential features of the practical self, “play shatters the seriousness of a utilitarian preoccupation where the self-presence of the subject is too secure. In play, subjectivity forgets itself; in seriousness, subjectivity is regained.”¹⁴² If, according to the perspectives explored throughout Section 4, individual technologies can be seen to be *open* to playful negotiation and interpretation at the practical level, then these features of technology need to be incorporated into a hermeneutic account. The hermeneutic critique of technology, which characterizes technology as univocal and ordered, and therefore as *impractical*, also contains the resources for thinking about what counts as a *practical* technology – a multivocal, engaging, transformative technology.

¹⁴¹ Ricoeur. “Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics”, 171.

¹⁴² Ricoeur, “Appropriation”, 186.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Having begun with the observation that Ricoeur said relatively little about the subject of technology, I hope to have shown that his discussions were nevertheless running parallel to a broader discourse about the practical and hermeneutical qualities of technologies. Hermeneutic understandings of practical wisdom and appropriation, classically limited to the problem of textual and linguistic interpretation, take on a renewed significance when placed alongside a consideration of technology. I have aimed to highlight both the constructive and difficult features of this interaction.

I have argued that modern technologies, when considered from the point of view of hermeneutic accounts of practice, can be considered as *reflective* of concerns that arise from practical understanding. That is not to say that they should be taken as straight-forward representations. As a critical hermeneutic account of technology highlights, there is also something unfamiliar and difficult about distanced representations. Within the context of Ricoeur's work, the notion of reflection implies the dual movements of *distanciation* and *appropriation*. That is, technologies produce distanced images of practice, which then must be re-assembled through future engagements. Through their distance technologies are *problematic*, they tend to reduce meaningful, variable relations to a technical structure or logic. However, these technical structures are not fixed, they possess their own indeterminacy and variability, revealed through their encounters with practical wisdom. By being *open* to engagement, as in the accounts of the device and the interface, their problematic, distanced worlds can potentially be rendered *significant* at the practical level. Their significance is found in their ability to create new possibilities for action and practice. The back and forth relation between technologies and practical wisdom is productive and transformational. This point only emerges when neither side is reduced to the other. In this way, the hermeneutic *critique* of technology is a useful starting point for thinking about technology, since it allows for a consideration of the irreducibility of practical wisdom to technical knowledge, and vice versa. However, this perspective calls out for a corresponding *restorative* hermeneutics of technology. Given that the critical account of technology has already been admirably and exhaustively treated, this thesis has attempted to sketch an outline of what such a restorative account may look like.

Section 1 asked whether the hermeneutic critique of modern technology was entirely justified. I focused on the key hermeneutic concept of practical *application* and argued that the hermeneutic suspicion of technology can be seen to operate strongly at this level, in the view that scientific method remains *indifferent* to questions of application and that technology, seen as an extension of the scientific worldview, is a concrete expression of this indifference to application. Technologies are *anti-practical* in this sense, and the hermeneutic question of application is forgotten in a technological age.

It was asked, however, whether this picture of technology needed an update. The work of David Kaplan highlighted the necessity of taking Ricoeur's work, which places heavy emphasis on mediation and contextual understanding, beyond a critique of technology based on its transcendental features, towards a properly *hermeneutic* engagement with the living features of individual, pluralistic technological configurations. Furthermore, whether confronting a text, artwork, or technological artefact, questions of *technique* are unavoidable; in the creation of any of these works, techniques were developed and deployed to mediate the emergence of meaning and significance. An engagement with the technique aspect of a work involves a *detour* through the structures of the work. As Ricoeur states, such a detour involves self-alienation, but it also increases our understanding and our enjoyment of a work.

Section 2 explored Ricoeur's understanding of the dialectic between application and distancing. It was demonstrated that Ricoeur's distinctive approach to hermeneutic understanding involved the necessity of detour. *Meaning*, for Ricoeur, is not attributable to a mental construction, but is something that occurs *in and through* the world, i.e., *at a distance* from the subject. This means that language, on the one hand, can be reduced to its observable structural and systematic features. On the other hand, meaning is also a feature of *living interpretation*, it is not only 'in' the world in a purely objective sense; it also calls out and implicates us. This *living*, changing aspect of language-systems means that no structural or phenomenological reduction can result in a unified understanding of language. The *symbolic* aspect of language means that it is always also a *practical* phenomenon, occurring within the world and among participating subjects.

The double nature of meaning, as being both systematic and significant, implied two key points. Firstly, the 'truth' that both Heidegger and Gadamer associate with the experience of *belonging*, and which stands opposed to the representations of *method*, cannot be grasped independently of the autonomous, distanced structures that condition and enable this

belonging. A distanced perspective, given through reflection, is potentially as disclosive as the experience of belonging. Secondly, though, the way that a distanced perspective becomes disclosive is through its *projective* character. Along with Gadamer and Heidegger, Ricoeur agrees that distanciation is indeed a mode of alienation, yet he conceives this alienation as holding the potential for the projection of *other* ways of being. The projective character of a distanced perspective cannot be grasped from within the perspective itself, however. It can only be grasped through appropriation. Therefore, belonging and distanciation both participate in a broader dialectic. As an example of this dialectic at work, the relation between ‘computation’ and ‘intuition’ in design processes, was also mentioned. Here, the work of designing is enabled through a spiral of understanding; an intuitive, playful relation with the world is enriched and deepened by the complementary task of translating these experiences into a reflective mode of expression. This act of distanciation produces new possibilities which then have to be re-integrated into the design experience, with the whole process repeating endlessly.

In Section 3, this dialectic of distance and belonging was carried towards the question of *technique*. I argued that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics includes the possibility of considering *technique* as form of distanciation on the condition that we view it as indirectly related to *practical understanding*. Ricoeur’s distinctive account of technique aims to retain two important views. Firstly, *technique* is non-technological, in that it is dissociated from ‘observation’, attitudes of ‘control’, and so on. In the case of narrative emplotment, it also resists a technological approach to time, since narrative works combine the technological or cosmological *time of the world* with the phenomenological, lived *time of the soul*. However, it is also dissociated from classical hermeneutic accounts of meaning and explication. Techniques are not *directly* aimed at explicating or constructing a meaning. Instead, they are directed towards quasi-scientific notions of force, order, explanation, and so on. In this way, techniques, taken in the positive sense, are associated with the phenomena of distanciation, they stand at a distance from relations of belonging, but this distance is not the radical distance associated with observational methods.

Ricoeur’s account of psychoanalytic technique highlighted the fact that, in the context of analytic experience, the technique itself *mediated by language*, i.e., by the insights, slips of tongue, narratives, etc., which appear *within* the intersubjective, dialogical situation. Therefore, although concerned with the *economics of desire*, its concern is limited to what has already by admitted, by interacting, historical subjects, into a concrete setting. Separated from this

dependency on practice, techniques risk becoming modes of enframing. Within, the context of practice, on the other hand, they are understood as being a productive form of disclosure. They allow for the clearing away of resistances and the uncovering of hidden features of practical understanding that are present but unacknowledged.

However, the fundamental difference between an attempt to explain the workings of the unconscious, via technique, and the historical, living, and therefore *incomplete*, nature of the subject matter of the technique (the life history of the analysand), means that the dialectic between technique and appropriation is potentially interminable. Since the *difference* between the technique and the practice (between distanciation and belonging) is also the condition for the emergence of new self-understandings, the generative nature of technique is also what gives rise to its incompleteness. While psychoanalytic techniques are *productive*, they do not *produce*, in the sense of giving access to a cure, a ‘completed’ self-understanding, and so on. Instead, it is only *practical wisdom* that can determine when a course of therapy is *complete*. Just as in the case of a painter, well-versed in their own particular style or technique, must make a *judgment* as to when a painting is complete (otherwise, they would endlessly, recursively add to the painting), self-understanding is asymmetrically related to practical wisdom.

In the case of narrative works, it was shown that narratives also become meaningful through the combining of two different regions of understanding. The temporality associated with emplotment, the *time of the world*, recalls both Ricoeur’s analysis of technique (as dealing with quasi-scientific questions of force, organization, etc.) and Simpson’s characterization of the time of modern technology, which stands opposed to the time of practice. However, in the case of narratives, this time is productively combined with the time of *action*, meaning that narratives draw from both the explainable, objectified time of the world, and the living, indeterminate time of practical repetitions and imitations. In this way, narratives provide a useful framework for thinking through the relationship between a distanced representation of a practice (for example a technological solution to a practical problem), and the role that readers or users of this representation play in the act of re-figuring it.

The act of reading is a meaningful, transformative activity, because the *world of the narrative* stands against our own world and demands to be taken on its own terms. Indeed, much of the pleasure of reading arises from the encounter with the unfamiliar and alienation from oneself. The narrative world is at once foreign and inhabitable, since it inscribes within the time of the

plot the lived time of experience. Every narrative world projects an *implied reader*. The perspective of the implied reader, inscribed within the narrative structure, opens the cosmological time of *emplotment* to the de-totalizing *time of initiative*. Just as the narrative object (*mimesis*₂), whilst possessing an identifiable structural integrity, cannot be separated from its “upstream” (*mimesis*₁) and “downstream” (*mimesis*₃) relations, technological configurations ought not to be abstracted from their dependant relation to their applications and their history of development. Like narratives, technological designs *integrate* practical concerns and questions, render these concerns *intelligible* (to a user), and *produce* new situations and connections within the lifeworld.

The question of the time of initiative, of the central role of the reader in the construction (and deconstruction) of the significance of the work, lead into Section 4, where the aim was to explore the space between technologies and their applications. Chapters 5 and 6 charted a tension between two different approaches to this question. On the one hand, the hermeneutically informed readings by Borgmann and Lewin suggested that devices and interfaces work to *conceal* the initiative of the implied *user* of technology. On the other hand, the postphenomenological and aesthetic accounts of the device and the interface suggested that these technological phenomena cannot be reduced to their ontological status, but rather must be grasped at the *practical* level through their mediating *activities*. In this way, devices and interfaces were granted the same dynamism and openness as narrative structures. Although technological designs may carry with them certain *intentionalities*, within the context of the lifeworld these intended uses are overturned and de-stabilized by the activities of the social agents engaging with them. In this way, technologies do not inhibit or conceal possibilities for action, they instead *support* and guide meaningful action. The implications of this approach lead to an *ethics* of technological design, where the transformative features of technologies can shape and guide the formation of the self.

On the one hand, this practice-oriented account of technological mediation resonates with Ricoeur’s understanding of the productive, mediating effects of *distanciation*. However, on the other, as we saw in the analysis of Ricoeur’s understanding of technique, there is an irreducible *difference* between the distanciation of a technique and the practical understanding of subjects who *appropriate* the technique. In this way, it is difficult to imagine how a framework of better-designed technologies could totally solve the problems of practical experience and understanding. At best, we could *aim* towards producing better designs, which would then require appropriation, giving rise to the need for improved design, and so on. The interminable

dialectic between practice and technique means that technologies, as I have characterized them (through the concept of distancing), cannot be reduced to their *practical* meaning. In this sense, the approach of developing a technological mode of ascesis, while attractive, fails to account for the features of the hermeneutic self that cannot be reduced to its conditions of formation, such as the wisdom it possesses through exposure to negativity and tragedy (i.e., points at which mediations break down).

The final chapter aimed to develop a practical account of technology that would stand at equal distance from both a hermeneutic suspicion of technology and an account that reduces the practical features of technologies to their impact on the human moral self. A *presentational* account of the dynamics of the interface, in Chapter 6, opened up a space for the consideration of the role of *play* in the practical engagements with technologies. Simondon's explanatory account of the technical object suggested that the *meaning* of technics is, in fact, concealed by the social and ideological prejudices against technologies. Attitudes of either distrust or naïve acceptance mask the essential, living features of technics. These can only be disclosed through a *detour* or investigation into the technical object itself. Such a detour allows us to productively transform our understandings of technologies.

I suggested that Simondon's conception of a productive human-technics relation mirrored Ricoeur's account of the self before the world of the text. In engaging with technologies, we are called on to develop an *enlarged self-understanding* in light of the world of technics. This means recognising both the *distance* of the technical object and the generative role that appropriation plays in mediating this distance. In other words, a discourse on technics can be productively supplemented with a discourse on the hermeneutic *self*. A possible framework for thinking about the relation between the self and technology is the hermeneutic notion of *play*, which is a mode of appropriation that secures self-identity through alienation from oneself (through the world of technics, for example). The notion of play is aimed at transforming our literal readings of technologies, by paying more attention to the symbolic and indeterminate features of technological application.

The multistability of devices and the presentational features of interfaces means that technologies, in practice, arrive with their own sets of problems, questions, and projections demanding a response from the user. Users can unknowingly, unreflectively conform to the utopia of functionality and comfort offered by these phenomena, at the cost of losing out on a meaningful relationship with their environment. Such a relationship can only be built-up

through the non-identical repetitions of a practicing, learning self. Alternatively, as Verbeek suggests, users and designers can harness the variability and dynamics of devices and interfaces in order to draw on the interpretive potential of human agents interacting with them. In this way, technologies become co-shapers of a broader social *ethos*, aimed toward the productive, morally-guided *transformation* of the self.

Ricoeur's work, I have argued, implicitly draws on both perspectives; technologies produce alienating effects, but also mediate understanding by uncovering untried possibilities for praxis. Accepting the variable features of technical designs and applications means that the hermeneutic task becomes one of interpretation and engagement. Technologies, through their practical limitations and unworkability, depend on inventive, creative practical responses. The unplanned *future* of technology is secured, not through greater levels of optimization or technical functionality, but through creative appropriations. These appropriations succeed because they attest to the *inventive*, singular nature of individual technologies. The true *iterability* of a technology is found in these unforeseen, practical uses and applications. That is, technologies themselves need to be situated within the paradigm of non-identical repetitions. In an almost counterintuitive way, the futures of technologies lie in their fallibility, since it is their practical incompleteness that renders them open to renewed attempts at completion. Without these explorations of hidden variables and uses, technologies would not be able to survive the living, dynamic temporalities associated with practices, contexts, cultures and history.

Exposure to and engagement with the world of technics also transforms practical self-understanding. We are reminded of the naivety and unquestioned status of many features of traditions or practices that we had come to depend on. If technologies help to draw out and translate these un-noticed features of the lifeworld, then we have a responsibility to explore and engage with the consequences of these representations. The generation of new forms of practical technologies, then, would count as a creative engagement with oneself. Since technologies don't reveal *directly* our concerns or values, this self-engagement, mediated by technology, must take place at the interpretative level, through difficult negotiation and exploration. Deepening and widening the hermeneutic spiral of reflection and belonging involves the active attempt to risk the security of the ego by exposing it to new practical possibilities for action and interaction, brought about by technologies and their mediating effects. Overcoming the alienating effects of technologies involves the multiplication and

diversification of technological forms, and the corresponding generation of different types of selves implied in these projected worlds and milieus.

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